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CHRISTIAN COURIER

The hazardous life of a Haitian cop

(Pierre) Erick Joseph

President Preval (centre), the president of the Assembly (to Preval's left) and Erick (behind).

Bert Witvoet

ST. CATHARINES, ON – At 33, (Pierre) Erick Joseph has endured more dramatic life experiences than most people his age. It started even before his birth in 1976 in Gonaeves, Haiti. His parents wanted to abort him, but when that did not happen, they left Erick with his grandmother Clerensine Charles. They didn't want the responsibility of raising him. His father went back to Port au Prince, the capital, and his mother went to live in New York.

Living with his grandmother was good for Erick, even though it meant a life of poverty. She was a pious woman who was concerned about her grandson's physical, social and spiritual well-being. As soon as Erick was old enough, she would wake him at five in the morning to pray to God. She enrolled him in the local Catholic school and told him that he had to succeed so that, one day, when he became an important person, his parents would come to him and apologize for having abandoned him.

Ecclesiastical judgment

After primary school, Grandmother Cleresine could not afford to send Erick to high school. She arranged for a priest, Father Guerlain Chancy, to become his godfather and to look after his education. Father Chancy took Erick to Port au Prince, where he enrolled him in a Catholic high school. One year before Erick graduated, his grandmother died. Wanting him to become a priest, Father Chancy enrolled him in the local Catholic seminary. But after one year of study there, Erick discovered that he would not be allowed to the priesthood because he was deemed illegitimate – his parents were not married when he was conceived and born.

Father Chancy then decided that Erick should become a doctor, but Erick wanted to study international diplomacy instead. Father Chancy acquiesced and, after Erick had completed two further years of schooling, used his connections with president Aristide to get Erick into the secret police as a bodyguard for the President. Erick was sent to Washington, D.C. for a year of rigorous training. After that, he worked at the palace from 2000 to 2001 and got married to "a beautiful woman" called Magdella.

A tragic outcome

And then more trouble came his way – big trouble. Erick was

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Life goes on in Haiti.

Earthquake coverage:

Technology and the quake (page 4)
CRWRC missionaries in Haiti (page 8)
God's grace amid the rubble (page 15)
How to donate through CRWRC (page 8)

Post-earthquake aid

Angela Reitsma Bick

For every child who died during the earthquake, three will be left with life-long disabilities, according to estimates from christian blind mission (cbm) Canada. *Christian Courier* interviewed Beth Jost-Reimer, director of communications for cbm, to find out how aid organizations are coping.

CC: What are the most immediate concerns for cbm in Haiti?

Beth Jost-Reimer: Making sure that survivors who have disabilities, or injuries that will result in long-term disabilities, get the food, water and medical care they need.

How do you distinguish between those with disabilities and those without?

Jost-Reimer: cbm has had projects in Haiti for over thirty years. We work with local partners through grassroots networks, which is a real strength. That means we know, generally, who our disabled clients are – so we are finding them right now and taking relief aid to them. If you see trucks distributing water on the evening news, you don't see people with disabilities there; they really can't compete.

See **Aid** *on page 2*

News

Hazardous life *continued from page 1*

asked to enforce the law against illegal drug dealers. As squad leader he led an attack and arrested several members of a drug cartel. The drug dealers struck back. They went to Erick's house and murdered his wife with one bullet to the head. In Haiti, there are more guns in the hands of the criminals than in the hands of the authorities, says Erick. For years already, UN police and soldiers from Canada, France and the United States have been trying to maintain order in this violent society.

Erick was shocked and deeply disturbed by the murder of his beloved Magdella. He began to question the God that he had been trying to serve all these years. What kind of God would allow an innocent person to be murdered? What is the use of prayer if God does not protect you? Erick felt he was wasting his time with God.

Erick continued his work at the palace and was promoted in 2003. That's the year he got married to Barbara, who had a son named Gregory (also an "illegitimate" child). Barbara worked for the government. Together they had a daughter, whom they named Enrika. Life began to look more hopeful for Erick, that is, until the year 2004, when George W. Bush was instrumental in kicking out President Aristide, the socialist leader of the Democratic Party, and replacing him with a right-wing republican candidate. Aristide fled to South Africa. Erick and his family left Haiti and, after a while, ended up in Venezuela, where Hugo Chavez, a friend of Aristide and enemy of George Bush, was the president. Erick even functioned as a bodyguard for Mr. Chavez's doctor for a year.

Short reprieve

But the family returned to Haiti when Preval, the new leader of the Democratic Party, became President of Haiti in 2006. With the new president in power, Haiti opened up its doors again to Erick. Soon Erick was appointed chief of security at the palace of the National Assembly. His wife landed another job with the government. Things really looked rosy again for Erick. He had a well-paying job, his family

National Assembly after the earthquake

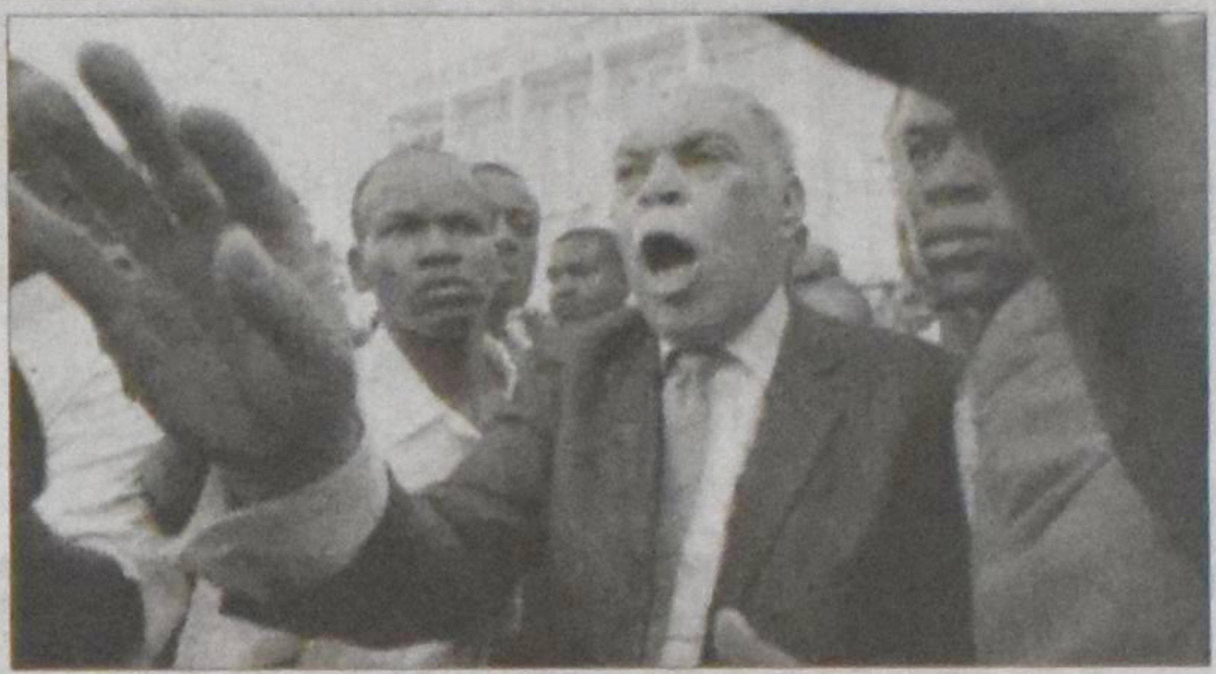
was doing well, and he loved the fact that he could travel all over the world with the President of the National Assembly.

But his happiness would not last. In 2008, the people of Haiti became restless. President Preval had not brought much improvement to the dismal social conditions in Haiti. Protesters started showing up at the gates of the presidential palace and the Assembly palace. By now, Erick was personally experiencing the hatred of dissatisfied Haitians as well as of Aristide supporters who were suspicious of Erick's success under a new regime. Why was Erick the only one who had survived the coup against Aristide? Even worse, his old enemies, the drug dealers, reared their heads; they had not forgotten about Erick's role in the raid of 2001.

Soon, Erick's life was in danger again. He received anonymous death threats against him and his family. Rocks were thrown at the windows of his house. His children were followed as they went to school. Knowing what his enemies were capable of, Erick decided it was time to leave Haiti. He arranged for his family to go into hiding. With the blessing of the President of the Assembly, in June 2008, he stepped onto an airplane that would take him to Miami.

An unpleasant welcome

Erick stayed in Miami for one month, but decided it was better for him to go to Canada. In July of that year, he stepped off the plane in Toronto. What followed then was not what he had expected. Immigration officials started a mentally torturous grilling process. Had Erick been a normal citizen of Haiti, they would have been less suspicious. But what did



Erick (far right) and President of Assembly, facing an angry crowd

this highly-placed secret-service man from Haiti have in mind by coming to Canada? Wasn't he too young to be in such a high position in Haiti? Had the CIA hired him to do some dirty work here? They ended up sending him to prison, where Erick stayed for three months. While there, he was assaulted numerous times, beaten up by prisoners who found out he was a cop. They suspected he was there to rat on them.

Meanwhile, agents from CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) took their time finding out whether Erick was a legitimate refugee. According to all reports coming from reliable sources in Haiti, Erick had no criminal record; he was a man of good character, he was what he claimed to be, and his life was in danger from criminal elements.

Eventually, Erick and his lawyer were allowed to make an appeal to an immigration judge. They argued that all CSIS had to do was make one phone call to the Canadian embassy in Port au Prince, and they would have cleared up the whole matter. Erick, who had endured three months of hell in a Canadian jail, boldly confronted the agents. The judge told the agents they should have put Erick in a hotel while they were doing their investigations, not a jail. He told CSIS that he was giving Erick his freedom and an opportunity to plead his case for refugee status in front of a refugee judge.

A new beginning

After having been set free, Erick stayed in Toronto with a friend from October 2008 till March 2009. It was at the urging of his Haitian friend Francois Wallace that he came to St. Catharines in March 2009. Francois had told him that a new family was waiting for him in St. Catharines: Jubilee Fellowship CRC. It was this family that ended up embracing him, as it had Francois a year earlier, after hearing his story one evening in November last year.

Erick doesn't feel lonely anymore, he says. He hopes to appear before the refugee board soon to plead his case for refugee status, and he is eagerly trying to have his family admitted to Canada as well. For two years they have been moved around in Haiti. His two children, Gregory (now 12) and Enrika (now 5) have not been able to attend school because of the constant danger they face.

And what about Erick's faith? Today it's stronger than ever, he says. It took him a few years to begin praying to God again. But then he started to notice how God was protecting him and his family in unexpected ways, even in miraculous ways. More than once, people who were lying in wait for him to harm him did not see him leave the house or pass the spot where they were watching. Yet Erick passed unhindered. It was also the godly influence of his grandmother and of Father Chancy that brought Erick back to God. And now he is strengthened in his trust in God by the love and example of friends and families at Jubilee.

Today, Erick dreams of his family joining him in Canada. But his ultimate goal is to get a university degree in international diplomacy and return to Haiti and its 10 million people – to serve his country again. "I want to help my people. They are so poor," he told his friends at Jubilee. "My enemies stole my past; now I want my future back."

Like many other Haitians, Erick is deeply disturbed by the Jan. 12 earthquake in and around Port-au-Prince. His wife and children are safe, although the house where they stayed has been destroyed.

Aid *continued from page 1*

Canadian media has been reporting an increase in looting and violence since the quake. Are your aid specialists in Haiti seeing that?

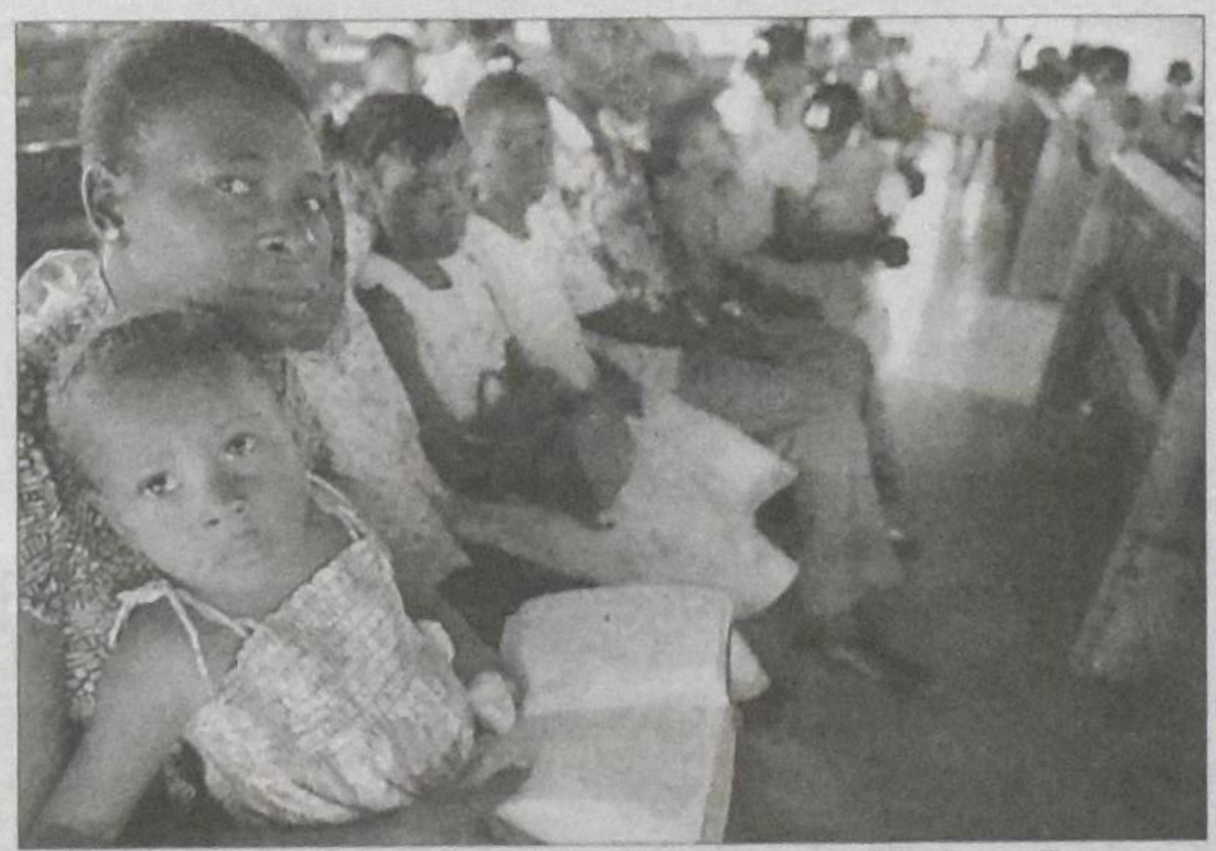
Jost-Reimer: I am sure that is happening, although it might be over-reported; these people are desperate. If we were as desperate to feed our children, I am sure we'd behave no differently. But we are hearing inspirational stories too. Some of our nurses at the university hospital set up triage units ... many people are going the extra mile to help others.

Are Canadians stepping up their donations?

Jost-Reimer: Absolutely, we have been overwhelmed by support. We thought post-Christmas, people would be tapped out, but we have seen a lot of generosity.

Ian Smillie is an international aid expert who says that "[w]e give generously in times of tragedy because we feel bad for ignoring the developing world the rest of the time." How would you respond to that?

Jost-Reimer: I think that it is true. cbm is primarily a long-term aid organization (even though we do have an emergency response team), and we believe that crises like this don't come and go with the media coverage. It is only natural for humans to give in times of crisis and out of deep emotion when they hear very tragic stories. I think it is our responsibility to use funds wisely to meet immediate needs, but also with an eye to the long haul. It's our responsibility to keep people informed, even months down the road.



A family attends Sunday church service at St. Jean Bosco Catholic church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

St Vincent school has 350 permanent students with disabilities. About half of them live at the school. When the earthquake struck, only the resident children were there. The school crumbled to the ground, losing 2 teachers and 7 children.

Christians, Muslims blame each other for violence in Nigeria

Lekan Otufodunrin

LAGOS, NIGERIA – A curfew in Jos, a city in the central part of Nigeria, was finally relaxed a week after inter-religious violence erupted and left about 500 people dead. Fighting first broke out on January 17 when, according to some reports, Christian youths were protesting at the building of a mosque in the Christian-majority area of Jos, the capital of Nigeria's Plateau State. The violence later spread to nearby towns and villages.

Followers of both Christianity and Islam in Jos, which has a population of about half a million people, each blamed gangs from the other's community for sparking the violence.

In an area that experienced similar unrest one year earlier, churches, mosques and houses were razed in four days of clashes. Human rights groups said around 500 people were killed, while government authorities quoted a considerably lower death toll.

Plateau State police commissioner, Greg Anyating, said a group of Muslim youths had begun the first clash, when they stormed a Roman Catholic Church in Nasarawa Gwon.

"The attack by the Muslim youths was without any provocation but we have been able to contain the situation," the commissioner said. Other churches attacked included the Apostolic Church, three branches of the Church of Christ in Nigeria, an Assemblies of God church, and two buildings belonging to the Evangelical Church of West Africa.

Earlier confrontations

The 2009 clashes between Muslims and Christians in the same area also left many people dead and properties destroyed. The state and federal governments set up panels to investigate the causes of that round of violence. Still, a Muslim group, led by Mohammed Mudi, has dismissed police claims about who was responsible for the latest violence as hasty. The group accused Christian youths, who it says were preventing a Muslim from rebuilding his house, of starting the fighting. The youth president of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the state, Pastor Bala Adamu, maintained that Christians were attending church services when that incident is said to have happened.

"How can you expect our youths to leave their services at that hour to go and attack the Muslims … We have never done it and we cannot start now," Adamu told Ecumenical News International. "We still insist that there have been premeditated plans by the Muslims to cause disaffection in the state, so that the governor would be removed." He said some imams from the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja wanted the federal government to remove the governor.

In a January 19 statement, the New York-based Human Rights Watch said that the Nigerian government must take steps to end discriminatory policies, "that treat certain groups as second-class citizens, and that lie at the root of much of the intercommunal violence in Nigeria. Non-indigenes are openly denied the right to compete for government jobs and academic scholarships. In Jos, members of the largely Muslim Hausa ethnic group are classified as non-indigenes, though many have resided there for several generations."

Nigeria's 149 million people are almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. About 10 percent of the population follow traditional African religions, which many followers of Christianity and Islam are said to incorporate into their beliefs.

CRWRC staff as well as the other missionaries and personnel of the Christian Reformed Church living in Jos, Nigeria, are all safe. –the eds.

NATIONAL POST

Prorogation altercation

Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

It is safe to say that, prior to just over a year ago, few Canadians knew what was meant by the *prorogation*, an arcane term that had long been part of the vocabulary of political scientists and their students but not of the general public. However, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has single-handedly filled this gap in our political education by proroguing Parliament twice in little more than a year.

To prorogue Parliament brings a session of Parliament to an end. It is distinct from *dissolution*, which ends the life of a Parliament and puts in motion the process of electing a new one. At prorogation all unfinished legislation dies and, if the government remains committed to it, will have to be reintroduced during the next session.

Under most circumstances proroguing Parliament is uncontroversial and simply gives the members of Parliament a break. As with so many things in our political system, the prime minister determines the length of a session. However, here in Canada prime ministers have sometimes used prorogation as a political tool. As far back as 1873 Sir John A. Macdonald requested prorogation from Governor General Lord Dufferin to avoid parliamentary inquiry into the Pacific Scandal, in which his government was implicated. In 2002 Jean Chrétien prorogued Parliament to delay reception of an expected report into the Sponsorship Scandal.

But Harper has used this tactic twice in fairly short order. A year ago it was to avert a threatened attempt to unseat his government by a coalition of Liberals and New Democrats with the support of the Bloc québécois. This time he requested prorogation from the Governor General ostensibly to enable his government to "recalibrate" its economic agenda before the new session begins in March. However, many believe Harper took this action to give him time to appoint enough senators to give the Conservatives a majority on Senate committees, and possibly even to avoid criticism over the military's treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan.

It is perhaps indicative of the public's response to this latest move that (as I write) 219,588 people have joined the facebook group, Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament, while an opposing group, Canadians Against "Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament", has 59 members. This may not be enough to bring down Harper's minority government, but it has diminished his public credibility in some measure. (Canadian Chihuahuas Against Proroguing has 150 members!)

If Harper has succeeded in adding prorogation to Canadians' vocabulary, he should now focus on doing the same for *responsible government*, which requires the government of the day to maintain the confidence of the House of Commons in order to continue governing. If Parliament should withdraw its confidence, the government must resign.

Harper entered office in 2006 with promises of reform, including an elected Senate and fixed election dates. To be fair to him, the opposition parties prevented his minority government from making the Senate a more effective and democratic upper chamber. He succeeded in enacting a law supposedly fixing the dates of federal elections, but he himself went against the spirit, if not the letter, of his own law by requesting an early dissolution of Parliament in 2008, a full year before the date set by the act.

Reform is badly needed to curtail the power of the Prime Minister to manipulate the machinery of government to benefit his own party. Failing that, perhaps the Governor General needs to envision herself as less of an ornamental head of state and more of a guardian of the constitution against the partisan manoeuvrings of a sitting prime minister.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is now blogging at: http://firstthings.com/blogs/evangel/.

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Editorials

Three cheers for the digital village

Angela Reitsma Bick

It was hard to get through those first news clips on Haiti. I kept crying and my young girls weren't sure why. I fumbled my way through a definition of earthquakes and showed them Haiti on a world map. As the terrible details piled up, so did email updates from family and friends. My younger sister works for a non-profit that runs a children's hospital in Port-au-Prince. The hospital employs 400 Haitians, many of whom are still unaccounted for. The survivors they've found have lost homes, family members – nearly everything. In the first week after the quake, personal connections like this drew us closer to the heartache. From Canada's governor-general to Barrie First CRC's minister, ties to Haiti kept popping up.

Although it's not a perfect metaphor, the idea of a global village feels applicable. As McLuhan imagined, technology has shrunk the world sufficiently so that, hours after an earthquake occurred 3000 kilometres away, we could view it ourselves via video links. In the days following, there was an almost unmanageable flood of statistics, photos and stories. And with that increased awareness came a growing sense of responsibility – another characteristic of the global village. There's an instinct, and pressure, to help.

I once saw a cartoon of two turtles preparing to meet God in heaven. "There's so much pain and suffering on earth," the first turtle declares indignantly. "I'm going to ask him why he isn't doing anything about it." The second turtle looks away. "I just hope he doesn't ask us that same question."

Today – ten days later – it feels like I've been crying a lot. All those tears get awkward; they slow down and muddy up the daily business of living. By the time you read this almost a month will have passed, and the aftermath will be outlined more fully. But a bit of the pressure will be off, too, once the most dramatic stories are told. Sometimes I think apathy is the best trick up the devil's sleeve. When we move beyond caring, we can't follow even the simplest command of loving God and neighbour. When we're too saturated with the images of suffering to make sense of what they mean, we can't figure out how to respond appropriately.

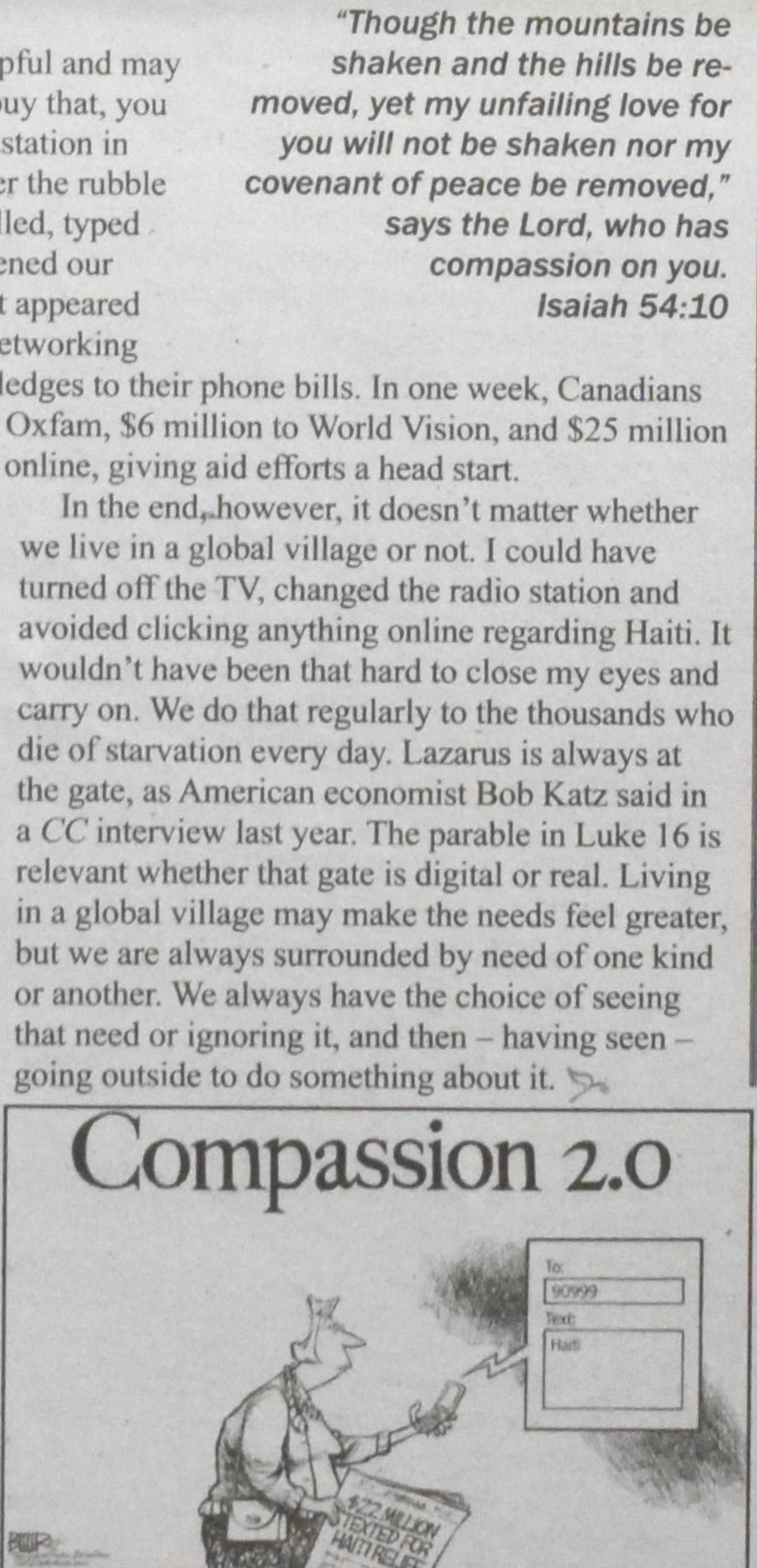
In that case, I'm okay with a few tears. May we all manage to grieve in some way. In fact, I'm grateful for the connections that put the tragedy into immediate focus: we had names, faces, specific parts of the capital city in our thoughts and prayers. It reminded me of the tsunami in southeast Asia that hit during our Christmas holidays. The whole family found itself waiting with my oldest sister for word from her college roommate, a Sri Lankan. These links can join us with the lives of others, and – if we're lucky – yank us out of apathy.

Eyes to see

Technicism is the belief that technology is always helpful and may eventually save us. Although Christians don't typically buy that, you can't deny that technology ameliorated some of the devastation in Haiti. Cell phones saved the lives of people trapped under the rubble and provided a vital link to relatives overseas. People called, typed or texted in their donations, so that by Friday, when I opened our mailbox to find an appeal for funds from World Vision, it appeared almost laughably old-fashioned. Even Twitter, a social-networking tool which seems narcissistic, let users add $5 and $10 pledges to their phone bills. In one week, Canadians donated $1.3 million through Plan Canada, $3 million to Oxfam, $6 million to World Vision, and $25 million to the Red Cross. Almost all of the donations were made online, giving aid efforts a head start.

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10

In the end, however, it doesn't matter whether we live in a global village or not. I could have turned off the TV, changed the radio station and avoided clicking anything online regarding Haiti. It wouldn't have been that hard to close my eyes and carry on. We do that regularly to the thousands who die of starvation every day. Lazarus is always at the gate, as American economist Bob Katz said in a *CC* interview last year. The parable in Luke 16 is relevant whether that gate is digital or real. Living in a global village may make the needs feel greater, but we are always surrounded by need of one kind or another. We always have the choice of seeing that need or ignoring it, and then – having seen – going outside to do something about it.



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Canada

A new Christian cinema? Again?

Brett Alan Dewing

In the past week, I have read two or three articles in the mainstream news proclaiming the new age of the Bible in Hollywood. While this may seem like great news, I would like to suggest that it may be more of a detriment to the spread of Christian thought than a boon.

Now, the news has cried wolf (or sheep, as it were) before in this regard. We all remember the recent trifecta of *The Passion of the Christ, The Gospel of John* and *The Nativity Story*. They were not even released in the same year, but the relative novelty of Hollywood tackling Biblical stories head-on led to the pronouncement of the "Christian market" as the new taste-setters in America.

Shortly thereafter, church-produced films such as *The Ultimate Gift, Facing the Giants* and *Fireproof* again raised the hackles of the liberal media, as they announced the death of film in favour of Christian proselytizing.

And both of these mini-trends did help break open the Hollywood bubble in ways that have changed the face of cinema marquees across the country. Neither, though, proved to be quite the new Renaissance many were eager to announce.

Blood vs. the blood

The evidence this time around? The one-two punch of action films released within a week: *The Book of Eli* and *Legion*. The former, a dystopian tale starring Denzel Washington as the guardian of a rare surviving Bible, has garnered middling reviews from Christian critics who see the many more offensive paths the story could have taken and rejoice that it did not. The latter is a horror-action flick about warring angels making earth their battleground.

While I admit that my poverty, current illness and fear of Hollywood blockbusters has prevented me from watching either film, the linking of these plots to Christianity worries me a bit. Far from presenting Christian characters or redeeming messages, they seem to use artifacts of the Christian faith (the Bible, angels) as springboards for violent effects-driven spectacle.

The basic misunderstandings of our faith implicit in this branding confusion shows up even more shockingly in another dystopian film currently in theatres. *The Road*, based on the highly acclaimed novel by Cormac McCarthy (who also wrote the book *No Country for Old Men*), is the story of a man and his son traversing a ravaged America while beset by death on all sides. The book is beautifully written and explores some interesting ideas about the fundamental religious impulse of man, but it is not in any way "Christian". Regardless, the recent film adaptation has been marketed to pastors and church leaders. The reason? It's about the apocalypse.

To make myself clear, *The Road*, whether book or film, can prove a great source of spiritual discussion for believers, but its dark, violent content and vague spirituality are hardly what churchgoers will expect from a "Christian film".

In the eyes of the world

One recent news article links the current "Biblically inspired" action films to a list of other movies that "used divine inspiration as a jumping off point." On the list? *The Omen, Dogma, Dracula 2000, Knowing,* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. A syllabus for the new Christian cinema? Hardly. The current trend in Hollywood seems to equate the end of the world with Christian belief. This is even more ridiculous than the traditional hell-and-brimstone/naïve-but nice dichotomy that has represented Christians on celluloid for decades.

It seems that we have a lot of explaining to do in order to separate the world of *The DaVinci Code* from reality in the eyes of Hollywood. Meanwhile, if you're looking for a Christian movie experience, I suggest *Jesus of Montreal, Babette's Feast* or *The Big Kahuna*. These and 97 more can be found on Arts & Faith's list of 100 Spiritually Significant Films (http://artsandfaith.com/t100/). Somehow I doubt *Legion* will make the list.

Letters

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On angels' wings

I enjoyed reading the article on Lowell Andreas' legacy gifts to the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) and Dordt College (*CC*, January 11). I have very fond memories of my annual visits with Mr Andreas while I served as president of ICS from 1990 to 2005.

On my first visit I was accompanied by my predecessor at ICS, Dr Clifford Pitt, a man who spoke with the wisdom and authority of his 75 years. At a certain point in the meeting Clifford leaned over the table, looked Lowell straight in the eye, and said, "What this Institute needs is a few angels to carry it on their wings, and you're one of them!" How prophetic those words turned out to be!

In several of our annual visits Mr Andreas repeated an anecdote about his days as philosophy student at the University of Iowa. Lowell enrolled in a course on the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and went to see the professor to ask about the course requirements. The professor inquired about Lowell's background and later announced, to the entire class, that he now had two course objectives: to teach the philosophy of Kant, and to persuade Mr Andreas to abandon his quaint Calvinist convictions.

To me, this little anecdote signaled that Mr Andreas understood, deep down, the challenge and importance of Christian higher education. It gave me a glimpse into why a soybean magnate from the US Midwest faithfully supported a little graduate school in Toronto committed to shining the light of Christ on the study on philosophy.

I count it a privilege to have known Lowell Andreas, and that the wealth with which he was entrusted continues to be a blessing for Christian higher education.

Harry Fernhout
Edmonton, Alberta

Striving vs winning at the Olympics

Chris Steenhof (Dec. 28 and Jan. 11 *CC*) seems to be aware that not all Christians are comfortable with the idolizing of human achievement that comes with the Olympics.

But he comes to the conclusion that we should enjoy the games, [following Paul's advice to] run the good race, and in everything strive for perfection.

And he sees the athletes as selfless compared to the players in professional sports.

It is not difficult to agree on that one, and I like the Olympics a lot better for that reason.

We have good reason to admire those people for their hard work, including the ones who do not make it to the podium.

But what to think about some sports like snow boarding and ski jumping? Do we have to pray for those people that they do not get hurt? Does Paul really mean that we have to strive to the point where we have a good chance to ruin our bodies?

Then we should encourage children or grandchildren to go for it if they have talent.

So far, I am still not convinced, but I will look at some of the games and enjoy them.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanston, Ontario

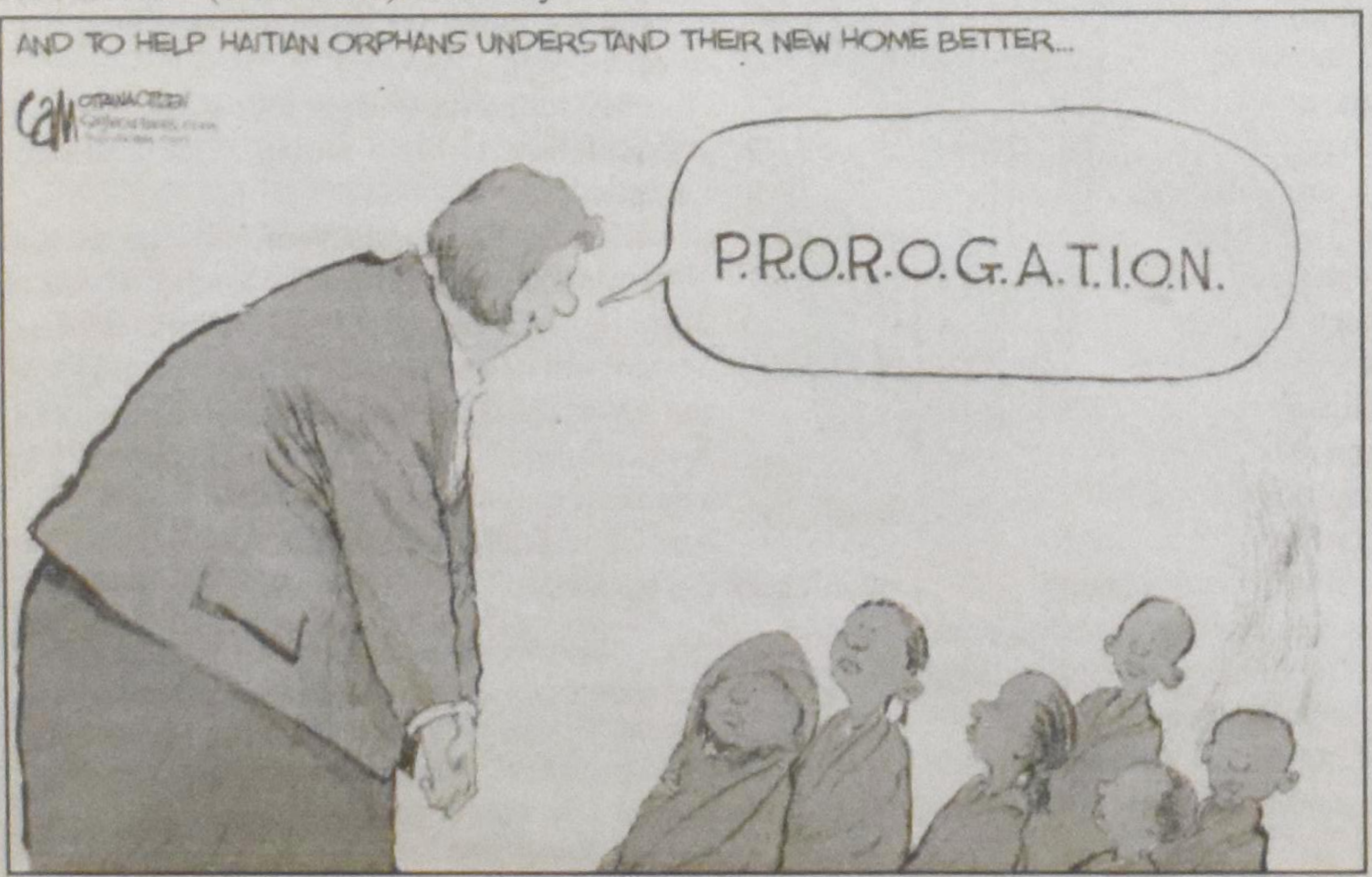
Pray for Israel

There may be a plight for Christian Arabs in Bethlehem ("Barriers to Bethlehem" Dec. 28 *CC*), but there would be a greater plight for them if they lived anywhere else in the Arab/Islamic world. Muslims do not tolerate any other religion. The Quran forbids them. A good Muslim practices jihad.

The inception of Israel came by way of a covenant to Abram. "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever" (Gen. 13:15). Does any non-Jew have any legal right to own land that was portioned off to Abraham, Isaac and Israel forever? As Christians of all races we should seriously consider this covenant.

The little nation of Israel needs true Christians to stand up for them, especially in the face of jihad. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Psalm 122:6).

Evelyn Dale
Dunnville, Ontario



Not a smart move by the Swiss

Mr. Antonides hits the nail on the head when he writes that the referendum held in Switzerland recently does not in any way abridge the freedom of religion of Muslims in that country (Jan. 11 *CC*). He is also on very firm ground when he accuses of hypocrisy those Muslim leaders who denounced the referendum, since there is hardly any Muslim country in which Christians enjoy as much freedom of religion as Muslims enjoy in Christian countries.

However, Antonides errs when he claims that no churches are allowed in sharia-ruled countries. First of all, there aren't many Muslim countries in which sharia is the supreme law. Second, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the best known of sharia-ruled countries, there are over 600 churches. In Tehran there are dozens of synagogues. Not bad for a country ruled by the supposedly vicious and blood-thirsty anti-Semite Ahmadinejad!

Moreover, three seats in the Iranian Parliament are reserved for Christians, two for Armenians and one for Assyrians. Judaism and Zoroastrianism are also recognized religions in Iran, and both religions have each one seat reserved for them in Parliament. Before we dismiss these reserved seats as cynical tokenism, consider that Iran's parliament has 290 seats and that Iran's population is 75 million. This means that each seat represents 258,000 people. Given the small numbers of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians in Iran, they are actually overrepresented.

Of course, it is true that Iran does not practice freedom of religion as a matter of principle because religions other than the four recognized ones are repressed. It is certainly not easy being a Bahai in Iran.

The Swiss context

Antonides might have given us some background information about Islam in Switzerland. According to the German Wikipedia, there were 310,000 Muslims in Switzerland according to the 2000 census. Even if we assume that they grew by 50 percent since then, that is still no more than 465,000, about 6 percent of the Swiss population. A good number of Muslims in Switzerland come from the Balkans, and Balkan Muslims must be among the least fanatical Muslims in the world, although they can of course be vicious nationalists, as we have seen in the recent past.

Also according to the German Wikipedia, the Muslims in Switzerland use a total of 160 prayer houses, of which only four are full-blown mosques. To have 160 prayer houses for more than 310,000 people does not suggest a high level piety. It does not seem to me that Switzerland has a serious Islamic problem.

Even if it did, the referendum was still an exercise in political stupidity. It did not reduce the number of Muslims in Switzerland by one person and it did not change the thinking of one Swiss Muslim. All it did was antagonize the Muslims without weakening them. That is not smart politics.

If Islam is dangerous to a liberal democracy, then it is so because of the ideas in the heads of Muslims, not because of the architecture of their mosques. Suppose that a certain government considers Catholicism dangerous and then proceeds to forbid Catholics to build towers on their churches, would that seriously weaken Catholicism in that country? Certainly not, but that is exactly the type of policy that the Swiss decided to carry out with regard to their Islamic minority.

I'm not much given to admiring foreigners, but I admire the Swiss because of their good political sense, solid economic virtues and technological sophistication. It seems to me that this time their good political sense abandoned them.

James Schipper
London, Ontario

Christian Courier

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Columns

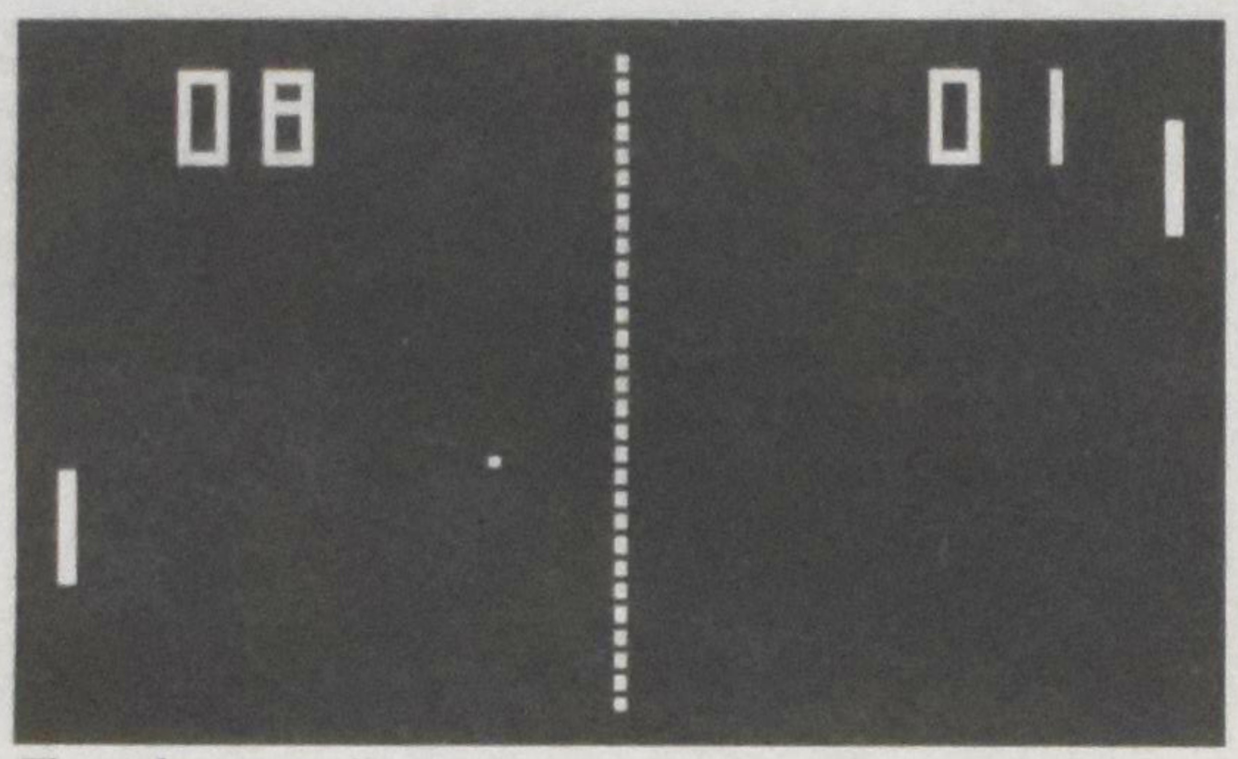
Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Redeeming video games

Much to the delight of our children, we recently purchased a video game console: a Nintendo Wii, to be precise. The Wii system has a distinctive wireless controller (the "Wiimote") which detects motion, allowing you to actively control games by swinging the controller in your hand. I must admit, I found myself delighted by some of the games such as bowling, tennis and golf.

I recall the early days of video games that featured iconic games like Pong. Pong was a simple monochrome 2-dimensional game that simulated ping-pong by allowing players to control the vertical position of a line (the "paddle") so that the "ball" (a square block) would hit the paddle and bounce back to the opposing player. When I first saw it, I was dazzled; it seemed magical. In my youth I squandered many quarters at the video arcade and more than a few hours on my home computer playing some of the early video games.



The video game Pong.

Modern video games enable a whole new realm of realistic rendering made possible by increasingly powerful video processors. We have come a long way from the modest Pong game, particularly with games that feature increasing levels of violence. "First person shooter" video game genres are extremely popular and enable a player to vicariously experience violent actions through the eyes of a game character. Other controversial games like "Grand Theft Auto" have the player take on the role of a big city criminal. Such games are often rated "M" for "Mature" – an ironic term for games that glamorize violence or combat. Many young boys and teens are powerfully drawn to these types of games, and some play them compulsively. Over the years, various studies have reported mounting evidence of adverse effects from these games such as an increase in aggressive behavior.

The problem of (causing) pain

As a professor, I supervise students majoring in computer science who are required to complete a senior project. Recently, a student proposed making a video game for his project that involved some combat elements. I challenged him to consider how one's faith would shape the creation of a video game. He argued that violence is part of life and that even the biblical narrative has stories of violence. Does this justify its inclusion in our games? What constitutes a redeeming video game?

Perhaps there is a place for combat-related role-playing games for military training, but what about for entertainment? Shallow and formulaic movies that celebrate violence and mayhem fueled by revenge or hate have few to no redeeming characteristics. Other films may portray violence as part of a story illustrating the reality of evil and the consequences of wrongdoing in a broken world. In this context, it can be legitimate. But it seems to me that the experience changes in a video game; it is a completely different context in the first-person since the player actively participates in the violence.

I posed the question of combat in video games to colleagues from other colleges and received a variety of responses. Some suggested that games could be structured to include choices that the player must make, and that the amount of points awarded would depend on whether the player chose a violent or peaceful solution. I challenged my student to think about expanding the space and paradigm that video games encompass, and to explore entertaining yet non-violent ways for players to overcome challenges. Although our viewpoints differ on this issue, he agreed to avoid combat in his game which is now starting to take shape. I look forward to seeing what creative ideas he comes up with.

Some alternatives are arising

There are some signs of hope for new paradigms in video games. Our Wii has some challenging sports games, and other games for the Wii encourage improved fitness. A recent game for the PlayStation called "Flower" takes you on a delightful journey as you take control of the wind and explore and navigate beautiful, lush environments. Perhaps some of my students will go on to shape and transform this part of culture as well – this is certainly an area that is ripe for transformation.

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." Perhaps we need to think more about what is "excellent", "praiseworthy" and "true" in our video games and electronic entertainment as well.

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@csredeemer.ca) is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. Derek and his wife Carina use an egg timer to limit their children's time playing on the computer.

Country living

Maynard van der Galien

Happy couples at the movie theatre

If you want to see couples in a happy relationship or marriage, one of the best places to see it is at a theatre. Yes, a theatre. That's my observation from years of observing moviegoers from the back row of a theatre.

It always amazes me how kind couples are to each other in a theatre. They might bicker at each other during the week, but when it comes to going out to see a movie, they are like love birds. The man is always a gentleman. They sit where the woman wants to sit. I've never seen a couple argue at the movies. The woman picks the seats. They enjoy their night out at the movies as if they were kids, or teens, again.

You see guys you'd never expect to see at a movie – and with a pretty gal at that. Some of the guys are the rough outdoors type. But they also have another side – all spruced up and taking in a movie with their sweetheart.

It's interesting watching a theatre fill up. A big burley guy with a shaven head comes in with a petite good-looking woman. They look like opposites. A mismatched pair, you'd think. She carries the popcorn; he the drinks. They walk slowly down to the middle of the theatre. She stops, looks at the big guy who nods and they go in halfway and sit down.

She hands him popcorn; he hands her the drink. They sit contently eating, drinking and talking while waiting for the movie to start.

A couple, probably in their late 60's, walk down the side aisle. The woman leads. It seems they know exactly where they want to sit – on the aisle side. She goes in first and sits in the second seat. He takes the aisle seat. There's a reason for that. He goes out and gets the popcorn. They munch on it and it seems to an observer like me that it wouldn't matter what happened to the world outside, or to this planet, this couple will enjoy their evening out.

I watch two teens – guy has short hair; girl has long hair – walk quickly almost to the front of the theatre. Girl knows where she wants to sit. Guy follows.

Two rural couples, probably married 25 years or more, know where they want to sit. The men carry the goodies; the women have large purses. They go half way down the aisle and one of the woman stops and looks at her companions. They nod and in they go and sit halfway in the row of seats.

A retired dairy farmer and his wife have a happy look on their faces as they sit in the third row from the back. They are munching on chocolates. She is probably thinking of all the years he was busy with milking and chores. Now they can have a relaxing night out. No more rushing to get away from the farm when they want to see a movie, or go to a dinner.

St. Valentine's Day

A couple in their early forties comes walking in, hand in hand. My wife nudges me. "Isn't that sweet!" she says. I nod absentmindedly, as I'm busy observing people. St. Valentine's Day is coming and I know readers would rather read a column on love and happiness than on farming.

My wife says women love going out with their fellow to see a movie … at least once a month.

I'll give husbands some advice as that important day is next week Monday. If you're thinking of getting your loved one flowers, chocolates or a syrupy card, that's an easy way out. Do more. Take her out to a good movie. Do it once a month. Go out for the evening. I've seen the happy faces.

And let her lead. She most likely won't pick the back row.

Meindert van der Galien (maynard@renfrew.net) enjoys watching classic movies on their large-screen tv. His wife Mae prefers the newer movies. For Valentine's Day they'll go out for a romantic dinner and see a movie.

Why prorogation doesn't matter

Brendan Kooy

Every now and then in Canadian politics, a routine gesture, action or comment will plunge the entire nation into a meaningless and pointless uproar. Often the charge towards such outcry is led by political columnists with not-so-neutral agendas, carried on by political party leaders and forgotten by the broader Canadian public in a matter of months.

Right now, the question is how long it will take for Canadians to forget about prorogation.

While Prime Minister Harper explains that prorogation allows his party extra time to focus on important issues, particularly the economy, critics argue that it wastes time by killing Parliamentary legislation, including the need to produce Afghan detainee documents. Prorogation also lets the Conservatives gain control of certain Senate committees. Opponents believe it makes a mockery of democracy; opposition MP's have pledged to remain in Ottawa for business as usual; political science professors have challenged the move as an attack on the powers and effectiveness of Parliament; and even the facebook crowd has paid enough attention to create a group called Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament that's 200,000 strong.

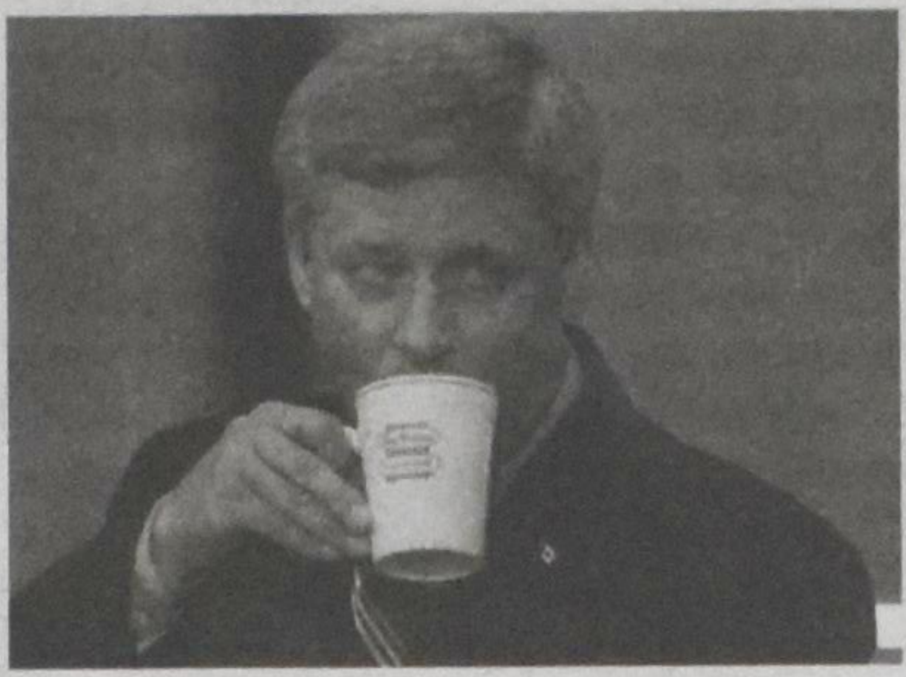
The wrong issues

Rather than arguing about whether prorogation is warranted or not, I would venture to say that the more important question is: who cares?

In December 2008, when Harper prorogued parliament for the first time, the uproar was greater. Over the next year, however, neither the Liberals, NDP or Bloc Quebecois proposed a way to limit the powers of the Prime Minister with regards to prorogation. Only in the last several weeks, after the most recent prorogation, have any of the leaders of the opposition parties come out to say that if elected, they would lobby for change . . . or at least not do it themselves.

In 2002 and 2003, however, "the little guy from Shawinigan," Jean Chrétien, prorogued Parliament with a majority government. He did not face the same scrutiny as Mr. Harper, despite the fact that the 2003 prorogation was only a week before the release of the infamous Gomery Report – a report on the massive Liberal advertising scandal.

If Canadians are so genuinely concerned about the virtues of democracy, checking the power of the Prime Minister, and making our system of government more accountable and efficient as a whole, there are more important issues to look at.



PM Stephen Harper enjoying a coffee break.

For one, why are Canadians not holding Mr. Harper more accountable to his commitment to Senate reform? An elected and effective Senate would go a long ways towards reducing the pettiness and inefficiencies of the House of Commons, and giving our political system another pillar of accountability.

What about taking a sober second look at the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms brought in by Pierre Trudeau, and the heightened (and un-intended?) power that it has given to Canada's legal system? Or using the same public enthusiasm generated over prorogation to support proportional representational government on the federal level? Political scientists have long realized the deficiencies that these three issues create on a grand scale for Canadian democracy. It's time that the public realizes them too.

There are bigger fish to fry than worrying about who prorogued and why. Canadians have proven that they can rally around a cause. Now it's time to find the right cause.

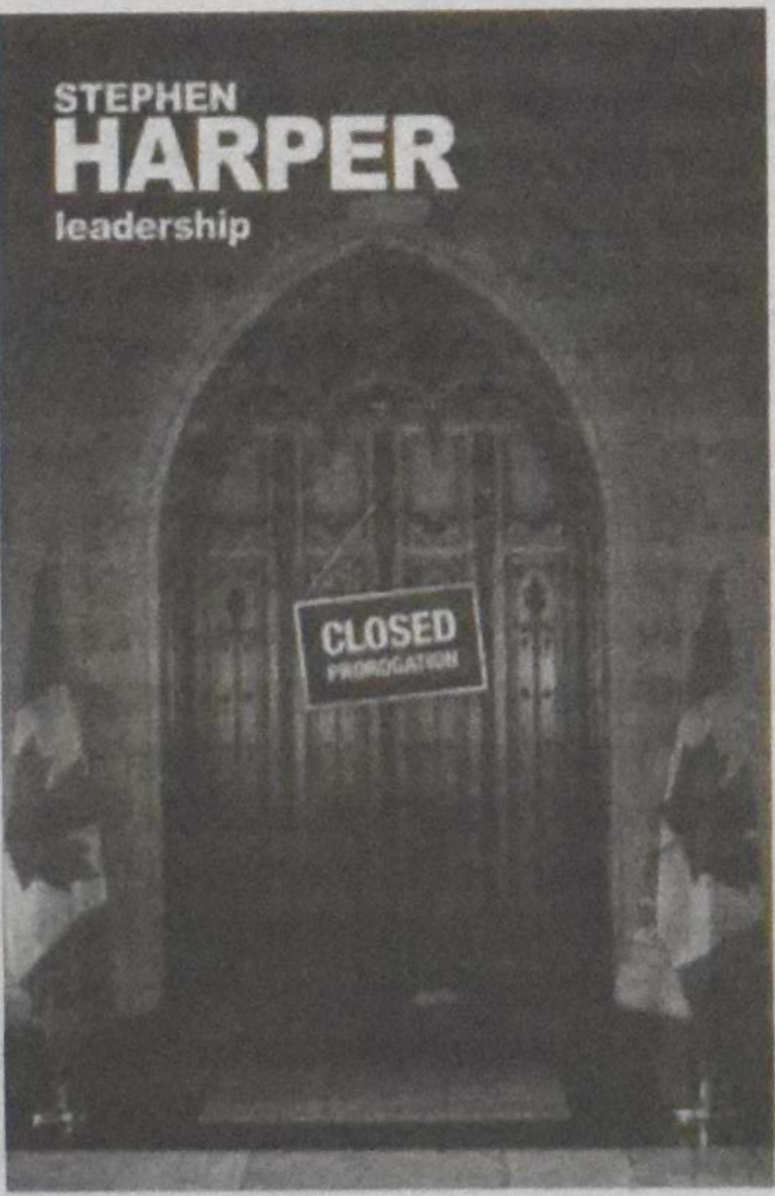
Brendan Kooy is an Ontario representative for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He currently resides in Chatham, Ontario.

20 Questions for Parliament

Kathy Vandergrift

The Prime Minister sent our MPs home to recalibrate the government agenda. The break was 20 workdays, he said. Here's a list of 20 key policy questions, one for each missed day. These are issues that Members of Parliament, as voices of the people, should debate and set the direction for Canada for 2010 and beyond.

1. **Poverty Elimination Strategy:** In November 2009 the House of Commons called for the immediate development of a strategy to eliminate poverty in Canada. What are the next steps to implement this plan?
2. **Building Peace in Afghanistan:** What should we be doing in Afghanistan, before 2011 and after?
3. **Affordable Housing:** In the last session, the first positive housing policy in years (Bill C-304) passed Second Reading in the House of Commons and was amended at committee; it is ready for Third Reading. Will MPs give its Third Reading top priority so it can be implemented?
4. **Budget Priorities – Expenditures:** What are the people's priorities for the next budget?
5. **Budget Priorities – Revenue:** What steps should be taken to make Canada's tax system fairer and provide sustainable revenue for public services that benefit everyone?
6. **Global Warming:** What will Canada do to mitigate the effects of global warming, particularly in the north?
7. **Energy Policy for Canada:** What principles and priorities should guide a new energy strategy for all of Canada, in light of the Copenhagen Conference?
8. **Immigration Priorities:** What are the principles that inform Canadian immigration policy?
9. **Aboriginal Children and Jordan's Principle**: In 2008 parliament adopted Jordan's Principle, to ensure the best interests of aboriginal children in the health system took priority over federal-provincial jurisdictional disputes, but it has not been implemented. The Auditor General verified discrimination in funding for aboriginal child welfare, but it has not been corrected. What can be done to ensure fair treatment and a better future for aboriginal children in Canada?



10. **Disparity in Income, Diversity, and Social Cohesion in Canada:** What measures could be taken to reduce the growing gaps between identifiable groups in Canada and encourage greater social cohesion, in light of diverse cultures and income disparity in Canada?
11. **Human Rights in Canada:** One year ago the government committed to improve mechanisms to implement international human rights obligations in Canada, but nothing has changed. How can Canada begin to implement economic and social rights?
12. **Well-being Measures of Progress:** There is a consensus that GDP does not adequately address environmental and social factors. What system of indicators should parliament adopt to better assess the state of the nation?
13. **Responsibilities and Rights of Canadian Citizenship:** What effective steps can be taken to encourage active citizenship and engage the public about rights and responsibilities of citizenship?
14. **Pensions:** What steps should be taken to ensure that workers' pensions are protected in the private sector and workers are treated fairly when companies dissolve?
15. **Aging Demographics:** What steps should Canada take in light of its aging population, to promote inter-generational justice and meet the needs of all age groups?
16. **Full Employment and Improved Productivity:** What steps can be taken toward a full employment strategy for Canada?
17. **Employment Insurance:** In 2009 Parliament enhanced EI benefits for Canadians. In the context of economic challenges, how will the EI system guarantee support during a time of historically high levels of unemployment?
18. **Corrections Canada Strategy:** What kind of corrections system do we want in Canada?
19. **Accountability for Use of Aid Dollars:** In May 2008 parliament passed a bill to ensure that aid would be used to reduce poverty and promote human rights. How will Parliament provide accountability on major issues such as reduced aid to Africa, development in Afghanistan, and emergency assistance to Haiti?
20. **Electoral and Parliamentary Reform:** How can our parliamentary system be improved? What steps can be taken to enhance the role of MPs? Could Senate reform help?

More than ever, we need a robust Parliament that debates and determines policy directions in the public interest and in public view. You may have your own list of priorities; let your MP know and join with others to raise the profile of your concerns. Citizens stepping up to the plate may persuade our parliamentarians to do what we elected them to do.

Kathy Vandergrift is a public policy analyst. She lives in Ottawa.

News

CRWRC is networking to help Haitians

Two missionary families evacuated

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CRCNA) – Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) international disaster response personnel have been traveling throughout earthquake ravaged Port-au-Prince evaluating opportunities to provide emergency relief and developing a network with other relief organizations.

Meanwhile, the wives and children of two Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionary families serving in Port-au-Prince – Ruth Van Dam and her children and Sharon Segaar-King and her children – arrived in the U.S. where they will stay until the situation in Haiti stabilizes. Their husbands, Howard Van Dam and Zachary Segaar-King, along with other CRWM and CRWRC staff who were in Haiti when the earthquake hit, have stayed to help in the relief effort.

"Let's thank God for safe arrival and pray for the rest for the travelers and safety for those who remain behind. Let us continue to pray for the many, many people in Haiti who have lost everything dear to them, or fear that they have," says Steve Van Zanen, director of the CRC's Event Response Team, which meets regularly to monitor the situation in Haiti.

Officials from Back to God Hour Ministries International were also relieved to learn that Sem Hypolite and Marguelita Petion, two of their employees in Haiti, and their immediate families survived the disaster. Due to Haiti's devastated infrastructure CRWRC is setting up a logistics center in the Dominican Republic as a base for procuring and distributing aid.

"Haiti doesn't have large reserves of food and other supplies at the best of times so the existing supplies are expected to be exhausted very soon, after which all supplies will have to come in from abroad, which makes logistics a challenge" said Jacob Kramer, CRWRC's disaster response director. CRWRC's first priority has been to get water, food, and medical aid to all those who need it.

Allied with Canadian Foodgrains Bank and others

"We are working with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to see what food aid we can provide, and with Medical Teams International to provide medical support. The first surgical team arrived last week and a specialized orthopaedic team was expected to arrive later today," said Kramer. Once these immediate needs are met, CRWRC's next priority will be both temporary and more permanent shelter.

"The images of destruction are difficult to comprehend," said Ken Little, CRWRC's senior Disaster Response Project manager, after visiting various communities in Haiti. "The earthquake turned to rubble a multi-story structure and left the one beside it standing. Homes made of concrete were often piles of rubble beneath a sharply tipping concrete slab that used to be the roof."

Ken Little and CRWRC-Haiti country consultant Ad deBlaiej traveled on Jan. 17 to project sites to assess needs plan CRWRC's longer-term response. One such site is in Bolosse, a community within Port-au-Prince where a CRWRC partner, the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Haiti, has a Bible college and pastoral-training campus.

They discovered that one of the key teaching centers on the campus was partially destroyed and that two students were killed during the quake. "When we arrived, an open air church service was underway," said Little. "We heard passionate prayers pleading for courage and help. We then stood and sang hallelujahs to Jesus."

> "Never before have I heard so many testimonies by survivors about their trust in the Lord."

Refugee camp in Port-au-Prince.

Testimonies of faith and grace

In the midst of tragedy, stories of God's grace abound. Pastor Elihu Metellus, the president of the CRC of Haiti (a partner of CRWRC and CRWM), was helping to pour a new concrete roof for a church construction project in the town of Belladere some distance from his home in Jacmel. When the quake struck, the last bucket of wet concrete was being poured onto the Belladere church roof.

At that same moment, a hundred miles away, Pastor Elihu's own church in Jacmel buckled under the force of the quake and was completely destroyed. No one was in the Jacmel church when it fell. In what can only be described as a miracle of God, the freshly poured cement of the Belladere church withstood the quake and did not fall down on Pastor Elihu and the other volunteer laborers standing on and under the roof.

"The Haitian people are a resilient people. A people who in the midst of their greatest need are focusing on their Lord trusting in his faithful provision," says CRWRC's Kramer. "Never before have I heard so many testimonies by survivors about their trust in the Lord who will carry them and lead them through this indescribable trial."

A CRWM missionary-school teacher in the Dominican Republic says she and her husband went to the large grocery store in Santiago where they discovered that the store had a special section set up with supplies for Haiti. "Customers could pick out items from this section, pay for them at the checkout counter, and then place them in an area near the exit door where they were tallied and prepared for delivery to Haiti. Packs of bottled water and boxes of milk were some of the items that could be purchased. Almost everyone in the checkout lanes seemed to be buying supplies for Haiti."

Back to God Ministries International says it has received word that its ministry building is still standing and generally structurally sound. But BTGMI still does not know the status of its 37 Haitian volunteers nor that of the 900 Bible study correspondence students. As Rev. Robert Heerspink, director of BTGMI, urges, "Continue to pray for the people of Haiti as they experience a crisis that defies description. Pray for great grace."

How to help:

If Canadians donate to Haiti earthquake victims through CRWRC by February 12, it will double in impact due to a generous contribution from the Canadian government. Donations can be made online, or cheques marked "Haiti Earthquake 2010" can be sent to:

CRWRC-Canada
3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 STN LCD 1
Burlington ON L7R 3Y8

CRWRC-US
2850 Kalamazoo Ave SE
Grand Rapids MI 49560

For continuing updates on the Haiti situation see the CRC's Help Haiti website at *www.crcna.org/Haiti*

'Emergency' birth control for Haiti

FRONT ROYAL, Virginia (CNA) – Following the horrific earthquake in Haiti the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) launched a campaign to provide what they call "emergency and basic health services" to victims in the country. But according to Douglas Scott, "Planned Parenthood looks at emergency birth control the same way most people view food, water and shelter."

"Planned Parenthood will use any excuse to ask for money, even when doing so is ridiculous," says Douglas R. Scott, president of Life Decisions International (LDI). "What the people of Haiti need is food, water, clothing and shelter. They do not need anything that Planned Parenthood has to offer."

According to the IPPF website, in addition to "essential basic and primary healthcare" they are also working to provide "specialist maternity and sexual and reproductive health services." IPPF argued that an increased vulnerability of women to HIV infection and sexual exploitation often follows natural disasters and that "many women lose access to family planning services, exposing them to unwanted pregnancy, and, in cases of rape, access to emergency contraception and counseling." IPPF has sent out thousands of letters asking for donations to rebuild its abortion clinics in Haiti which were destroyed by the earthquake.

Condoms instead of food

Scott says, "This kind of self-serving opportunism is common for Planned Parenthood." He cites statistics from past Planned Parenthood efforts in the wake of disasters. After the fall of the Romanian dictator in 1989, Planned Parenthood donated $22,000 to the country to buy abortion equipment and coordinated an airlift of 40,000 condoms. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the organization offered a free week of "reproductive health care" which Scott says U.S. taxpayers helped underwrite. After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Planned Parenthood raised money to provide "essential medication" and "bare necessities" which consisted of a few months supply of birth control pills and emergency birth control.

Education

Staal brothers donate funds for ice rink

THUNDER BAY, Ont. (OACS) – Thunder Bay Christian School students can now lace up their skates and spend recess and gym classes on the school's new outdoor ice rink. But this isn't just any old ice rink.

Student s at TBCS enjoy their new rink.

Officially opened last month, the $40,000 rink was built through a donation from the Staal brothers, three of whom are National Hockey League (NHL) players and the fourth who is showing significant hockey potential as well. The four brothers are alumni of the school.

Eric Staal, 26, plays for the Carolina Hurricanes and was named captain of the team three weeks ago. He will also hit the ice with Canada's Olympic hockey team in a few short weeks in Vancouver. Marc Staal, 23, a first-round draft pick in 2005 (12th overall), plays for the New York Rangers. Jordan Staal, 21, plays centre for the Pittsburgh Penguins and has since been a first-round draft pick in 2006 (2nd overall). Jared Staal, 19, is playing for the Sudbury Wolves in the Ontario Hockey League.

Principal Bea Hayen says the best outcome she foresees from the new rink is the promotion of healthy outdoor activity amongst students, as well as the opportunity to practice good sportsmanship and other positive relational skills as students of varying grade levels skate and play together.

"We also will be using it to foster community spirit among our families," says Hayen, noting there are plans to re-introduce skate and soup nights, formerly a tradition during which school families would spend an evening on the ice together and then head inside for hot soup and fellowship. The nearly NHL-sized rink is also available for outside groups to use, with permission, after school hours.

Thankful for their Christian education

Henry and Linda Staal, parents of the four siblings, were on hand for the ceremonial ribbon cutting that officially opened the rink on January 18. Bea Hayen notes that the Staals have spoken about the great influence the school has had on the lives of their sons, and that the donation is an appreciation for what they received there.

The impetus for the project first came from the school's booster club, which thought an ice rink would be a great addition to a school which has so many students who play hockey.

Dordt students film documentary in African slum

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC) – A dozen Dordt College students traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, December 29 through January 10 to film footage of one of the largest slums in Africa.

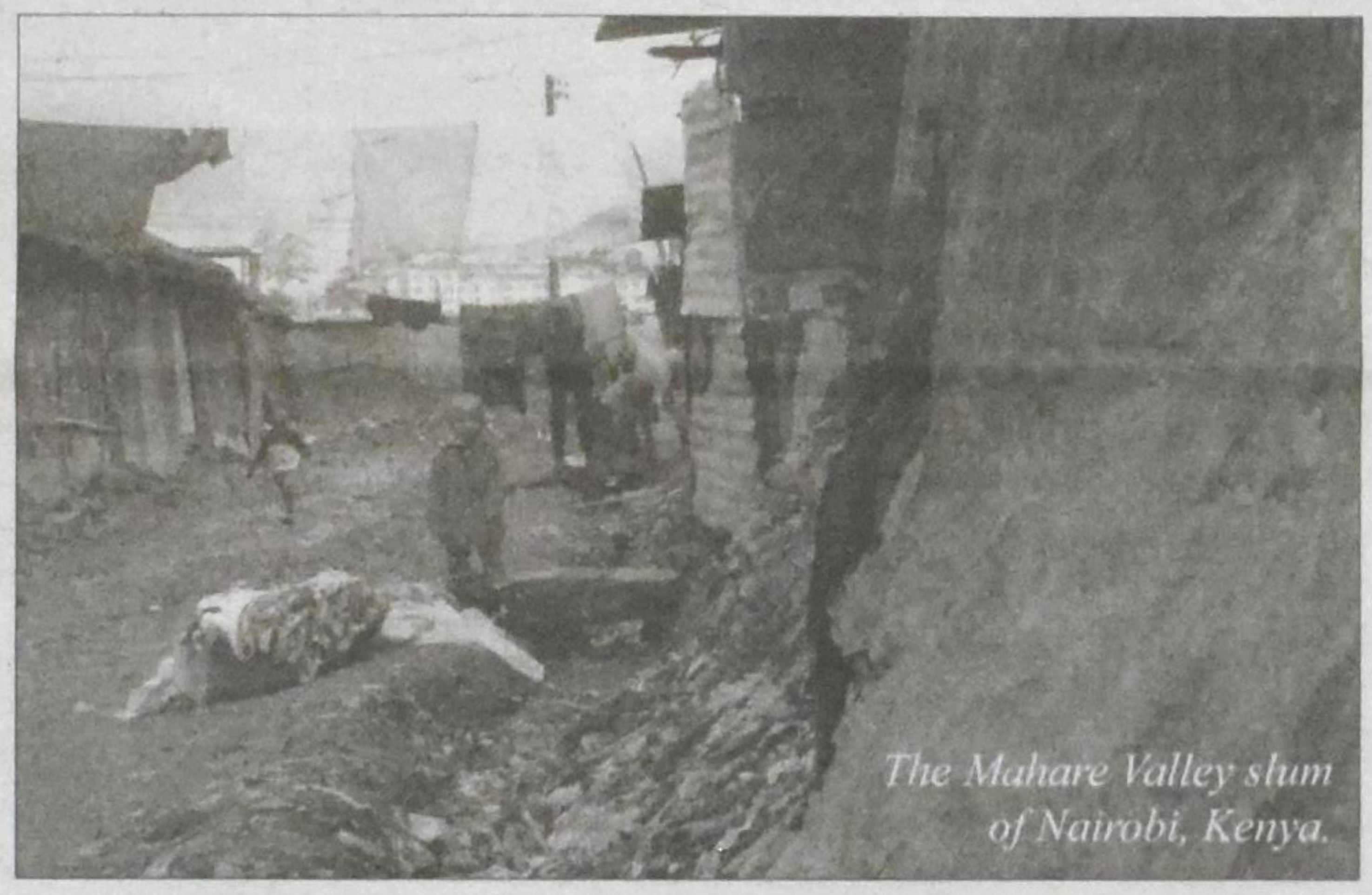
Making the trip to Kenya with Mark Volkers (see below), Dordt's digital media production instructor, were students from Iowa, Colorado, Texas, Florida, Ontario and Yucatan, Mexico. Peter Hessels from Dunnville, Ontario, is the Canadian who participated in the trip.

A slum in the Philippines and the notorious "La Limonada" slum in Guatemala City had previously been filmed by student teams, with Africa being the final filming location in the making of the documentary.

Each of the film teams had different assignments, with senior Daniel Kauten, junior Michelle Nyhoff, and Vern Eekhoff, a Dordt employee who had taken several courses in digital media, assigned to film the work being done by Mathare Valley Outreach, led by Pastor Daniel and Magdeline Ogutu.

Food, supplies, education for African students

Mathare Valley Outreach provides orphaned or malnourished children in the slum with the support they need to attend primary and secondary school. Three primary schools in the slum offer feeding programs, school uniforms for students, and additional clothing. Successful students can continue to college with additional support offered. In this way Mathare Valley Outreach hopes to help those living in slums to become self-supporting.



The Mahare Valley slum of Nairobi, Kenya.

The film team assigned to Mathare Valley Outreach interviewed a young man named Dennis, who was an orphan rescued by the outreach. He is currently in college training to become a primary school teacher, and wants to return to the slums and teach at the primary school where he grew up.

"When I walked into the slums, I was expecting to see a bunch of people who wanted out," said Dordt student Daniel Kauten. But that wasn't what he saw. "They would like to be able to eat every day and support their children, but most people call it home and don't want to move." He noted how powerful it was to observe those who are living in the slums praise God daily, despite their circumstances.

"Through our video project we hope to help bring funding and awareness to this ministry, and break the cycle of poverty," said Kauten. Their video will be shown to churches and people across North America and Europe.

Michelle Nyhoff noted, "Some days we would come back from filming with huge strides made, connections made and stories heard. Other days we would be at a complete loss [as to] where to even begin." In her blog she notes, "How do I rationalize leaving half the food on my plate at a restaurant when there's an old man sitting atop a trash pile right outside sticking the remains of a plastic bag into his mouth?" While filming in the slum they saw eight-year-olds sniffing glue to overcome hunger, orphans with scabies, children with head lice, a toddler whose only toy is an empty alcohol bottle, and more.

"What is our role as Christians in such overwhelming circumstances?" asked Nyhoff. "How did Christ react to these realities? Isaiah 43 was a comfort throughout as I wrestled with perspectives, culture, and feeling the Lord's heartbeat as it breaks for his world." She found the words of Fredreck Buechner helpful in sorting out her response to the trip: "The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

The cost of a drink: Notes from a slum

Mark Volkers

Today we entered Mathare Valley. Piper, one of the crew members, asked, "What's the nastiest slum you've ever been in?"

After some thought I had to say, "Mathare Valley."

I first entered Mathare Valley in 1985 as a college student. It was my first exposure to severe poverty and I've never forgotten the experience. Within a year, my parents joined me in the Valley.

Fast forward to 2010 (We spent New Year's Day 2010 in Mathare) and it doesn't look like much has changed.

Mathare Valley is a teeming mass of humanity separated by thin walls of mud or cardboard or iron sheets or even burlap. A complete lack of zoning means narrow, winding corridors become the main avenues and a lack of sewage services mean incredible filth spilling down the corridors into the Mathare River at the bottom of the valley.

In this place, clean water is gold.

Felix is 16. His older sister Winnie is 18. They and the rest of their family live in a tiny hut – indistinguishable from the others, in Mathare. They were born in this slum.

They pay 5/= (that's how you write "five shillings") for 50 litres of water. They go through at least 250 liters a day for a total cost of 50/= (about US 75 cents).

Winnie's parents make between 2,500/= and 3,000/= per month. If we go with the higher amount of 3,000/=, they earn approximately 100/= a day (about $1.25).

This means half of the household income goes toward one thing: water.

Let me say that again. Half of their monthly household income goes to water.

And it's not even good water. It's Nairobi tap water, which our crew was warned repeatedly not to drink while we're in Nairobi working. And they have to go fetch the water.

How many of us reading this spend half our income on drinking water?

I don't have access to my latest utility bill, but I pay a fraction of my monthly income for very clean drinking water that comes out the tap in several different parts of my house.

Winnie carrying water.

Something ain't right here.

To view short clips and find out more about the ongoing Slum Documentary Film Project, check out www.slumdoc.com.

The Church

Redefining Anglicanism:
conservatism battles structure

Keith Knight

Anglicanism isn't dead; it's just being redefined. By the end of this decade one can expect a major cultural shift away from the Archbishop of Canterbury and those deep English roots to African soil where Christianity in general and conservative Anglicanism in particular are flourishing.

The problem is both structural and theological.

The Anglican Communion is the 80-million-strong, worldwide body of Anglicans. It consists of 44 regional and national member denominations in 160 countries. The head of the Anglican Communion is the Archbishop of Canterbury who resides in London. Its most influential governing body is the Anglican Consultative Council, a group consisting of the primates (heads) of each of those 44 member denominations. That council meets every two or three years and is the church's policy-setting body.

Historically, the Anglican Communion is a Western-style Christian religion. North American Anglicans – they call themselves Episcopalians in the United States – have been the dominant theological force. The spread of Christianity across Africa, and in particular in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, has resulted in a considerable rise of conservative Anglicanism.

The World Christian Database says that two percent of the world's Christians lived in Africa in 1900; today it is 20 per cent. In less than 40 years, Africans will comprise 30 percent of the world's Christians. Taken together with Latin America and Asia, it will total 71 percent. In 1990, 82 percent of the world's Christians lived in North America and Europe. That theological shift is especially acute among Anglicans.

Dissent and splintering

The groundswell of conservative Anglicanism across Africa is providing an intriguing counterpoint to the liberalizing of North American churches. The Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church, its American counterpart, allow the blessing of same-sex couples, and The Episcopal Church has ordained two openly gay bishops.

This issue, more than any other, has riled African bishops. It has resulted in a handful of bishops refusing to attend the once-a-decade Lambeth Conference, the gathering of bishops in 1998 in Lambeth, England. Closer to home, it has resulted in the formation of the Anglican Church of North America, a collection of conservative parishes and dioceses who left the Anglican Church of Canada or The Episcopal Church to form this new denomination. By Anglican standards, the numbers are small. Just 3,500 members left the 700,000-strong Anglican Church of Canada. Almost 100,000 left the 2.5-million-member Episcopal Church.

The Anglican Church in North America held its inaugural general synod early in 2009. It currently has no formal status within the Anglican Communion. It can only be recognized as a bona fide denomination or "province" by the Anglican Consultative Council, and that body is not scheduled to meet for at least another two years. It is currently affiliated with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone (a South American denomination).

African bishops are supportive of this new conservative body in North America. They view it as adhering most closely to traditional Anglican roots. Those bishops will undoubtedly strongly encourage the Anglican Consultative Council to approve of the new denomination as a bona fide member of the Anglican Communion when they do meet. Such a move would place the Archbishop of Canterbury in an awkward position, however, since he would be giving formal acknowledgement to a breakaway group of parishes who have left two existing, legitimate North American denominations.

The future

Canterbury has been regularly criticized by African bishops for what is perceived to be his theological liberalism. This East/West fracture in the Anglican Communion will increasingly polarize the global body to the point that there is bound to be an irreparable fracture. If the Anglican Communion is to remain as a unified association, there is little doubt that its centre will shift to Africa from London. More likely, however, is a split down theological lines with Western Anglicanism remaining firmly entrenched in London while a larger, more orthodox body finds its home in African conservatism. That would also lead to each body choosing their own archbishop.

Winds of change? It is more like a gentle breeze. Change happens slowly in ecclesiastical circles. The theological rift will deepen over time. The only possible way to preserve the global Communion is if the authority of the archbishop is diminished and the Communion becomes little else than a watered down association of Anglican denominations.

Keith Knight (communic8n@yahoo.ca) is a communication consultant and former interim editor of the Anglican Journal.

My Northern Light

There is no language your beauty does not speak
Spiral galaxies curl in your hair
New suns shine behind each life-flushed cheek

And everywhere
Clichés orbit, are drawn to, cling
And are renewed
As your towering everything
Burns their decrepitude
Like dross or chaff

Your piñata smile bursts
Like a French photograph
Capturing eternity unrehearsed
While hardly pausing the flow

With the joy and pain it takes
To look into that glow
My art must break, will break, breaks
And frames you in a ring of fame

Tongues of fire seem to rest
On every head that speaks your name
As if they spoke a language blessed
By angels' lips

If I hold you so high
It is because your lights eclipse
All other bodies in the sky

– Brett Alan Dewing

Calvin was a biblical realist

Frank Sawyer

John Calvin was a biblical realist. He was more aware than most people that "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9), that wisdom must enter our hearts (Proverbs 2:10), and that we must guard our hearts as the "wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The practical result of a lack of self-knowledge has been demonstrated by great ideologies that sweep us into an idolatrous abuse of power.

Calvin certainly is among the "masters of suspicion" (cf. Merold Westphal, *Suspicion & Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism*), and in that he resembles Augustine, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Heidegger and Sartre – who all in their own way have dealt with the falsity and inauthenticity of human motives and actions. Calvin had a strong sense of our hidden motives and the rationalising of our intentions; for this reason he was aware of the inherent danger of all ideologies. Reformers (of many kinds) see imperfections more acutely – not just the imperfections of other groups (although Calvin is quite polemical toward other groups, as was rather fashionable in his time). But Calvin says very often that a variety of evils are "even greater among those who call themselves Christians" than among the pagans. Self-critique is at the heart of a biblical realism.

Calvin was critical concerning the use of human power, stating more than once that power corrupts. For example: "…the more power a person holds, the worse he will be, and the more roughly he will treat his neighbours" (Calvin's *Commentary on James 2:6*). It is hard to be more emphatic than when Calvin writes: "Our reason is overwhelmed by so many forms of deceptions, is subject to so many errors, dashes against so many obstacles, is caught in so many difficulties, that it is far from directing us aright" (*Institutes*, II.ii.25).

Kuyper would later follow up on this theme of our "limited abilities" in relation to self-knowledge and social action when he dealt with the problem of poverty and said that we must be aware of two kinds of problem: error and sinful abuse. That we are finite is not a sin; that we err is often unintentional; that there are obstacles is part of the picture; but the sin of pride and greed is what makes the question of social ethics so difficult (W.Skillen, *Abraham Kuyper: The Problem of Poverty*).

Frank Sawyer was born in BC and studied at Calvin College and in the Netherlands where he became a pastor. Since 1982 he has served with Christian Reformed World Missions, first in Latin America and then in Hungary, where he teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary.

Kuyper & Work, part II of II

Bert den Boggende

This is part two of an article exploring Kuyper's views on and relation to work. A longer version is available at www.christiancourier.ca

Kuyper's address

At the November 9 evening opening ceremonies of the First Christian Social Congress Kuyper gave a lengthy address, translated by James Skillen as *The Problem of Poverty*. In spite of the Reveil, he remarked, the church had given little thought about the social question. Many church members, indeed, seemed to think that Jesus' words that we would have the poor always with us were prescriptive. With very low wages, very long hours of work, very bad work circumstances, very unhealthy housing, and near-complete absence of social support, the workers could wait no longer. Kuyper posited that philanthropy was insufficient, that architectonic societal changes were needed, and that such changes were impossible without radical reform. Firstly, the workers' reality was the result of sin, which had led to human errors, false principles violating human nature, and unjust situations. Consequently, the balance between the classes had been lost. The task of the government was to restore organic unity. Since time immemorial governments everywhere had intervened in various ways in social life, although intervention based on false principles had created unhealthy conditions and produced an "ineradicable inequality between men" and "a world in which the stronger devours the weaker." That did not imply that the stronger class was more evil at heart than the weaker one. He took issue with socialists invoking Jesus' support for their utopias. Jesus had critiqued the unbridled accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor through usury, exploitation and manipulation, and its tyrannical use, knowing that "desperate needs grew from malignant roots of error and sin." Hunger, poverty, unemployment were anathema to God. Nevertheless, Jesus did not condemn wealth itself and he certainly never preached revolution. Rather, he wanted his Church to influence society in the way he lived, reflecting the values of God's Kingdom. The Church, Kuyper argued, was organized to seek peoples' eternal welfare AND to remove social injustices.

Secondly, the reality was a consequence of the French Revolution, which had "thrown out the majesty of the Lord in order to construct an artificial authority based on individual free will," injected "the egoism of a passionate struggle for possessions," broken the organic connective social tissue and replaced it with an atomistic society, and produced a profound social need. Making possession of money the highest good, it had set everyone against each other. This mercantile gospel had compelled people to seek happiness on earth. In spite of its equality motto, the opportunities at the start were unequal and hence there was no equality. The situation was made worse because "the luxurious bourgeoisie made a display of its luxury, exciting a false desire in the poorer classes and igniting the poor man's feverish passion for pleasure." While pope Leo XIII had treated all socialists as being the same, Kuyper recognized different schools, whose common characteristic was found in a "community feeling – feeling for social justice and for the organic nature of society – over against individualism of French Revolution and its corresponding economic school of laissez-faire." Due to lack of space I can only note that Kuyper took Liberal and Conservative economics equally to task.

Presenting a Christian approach, he stated that God had not willed that anyone should starve or needed to beg. Keeping this notion in mind, he provided a norm for work: "Christians must place the strongest possible emphasis on the majesty of God's authority and on the absolute validity of his ordinances, so that, even as we condemn the rotting social structure of our day, we will never try to erect any structure except one that rests on foundations laid by God." He suggested that through God's providence Christians could hold state and society each to its own sphere, while placing themselves on the side of the social movement. While Leo XIII's encyclical devoted considerable attention to private property, Kuyper only raised the issue very late in his address. Both held that absolute property belonged to God alone and that human beings only had it on loan from God. He argued for sharing the earth's bounties, rejected as prescriptive that people should eat their bread in the sweat of their face, and posited that labourers were worthy of their hire. Although workers were often treated as a piece of machinery, constituting a violation of their human dignity, Kuyper could only accept a minimum government aid in exceptional cases, afraid that state-giving would undermine the position of the labouring class and destroy its natural resilience. At the same time he reminded his audience that all state relief for the poor was a blot on the honor of Christ. He also reminded them that it was the government's God-given duty to uphold justice before arbitrariness and to withstand the physical superiority of the stronger. Finally he explained again his code of labour. The lengthy address, though filled with intellectual analysis, was really an emotional portrayal of the social question and intended to arouse the audience to action.

Reflections on the congress

The congress led to the founding of several locals of Patrimonium and gave the impetus to the founding of the employers association Boaz, which in 1918 split into three, one of which could be regarded as the grandparent of some Canadian Christian farmers' organizations. Later Patrimonium organizer and cabinet minister Rev. A.S. Talma worked out Kuyper's labour code scheme.

Kuyper realized that the social question could not be solved as merely a religious question, through an increase in piety, friendlier treatment, or more generous charity. Unlike many Christians, he recognized that poverty resulted directly from structural inequalities and was not the fault of the poor as a class. He argued that everyone had a responsibility to help one's "brother" and help change the structure in order to deal with poverty adequately. Community-based organizations were to play a role in eradicating poverty, and jobs should be accompanied by high enough wages to lift the poor out of poverty and dependence.

Government, Kuyper argued, should only be used as last resort and as umpire; the responsibility should remain with the family. This sphere sovereignty militates against the welfare state, yet as PM he introduced such social legislation as the Workmen's Compensation Bill, part of a scheme he launched in 1895. Although it opened up new avenues, other aspects, such as adequate pensions, allowance for orphans and for sickness, and retirement at age 65, were never implemented. Over time Kuyperians walked the new avenues. For instance, Christian school supporters in the Netherlands and Canada moved from no government support to limited support to total support (at least several schools in Alberta).

In spite of his black and white portrayal he did not forget to point out that through the historical process societal life had become so much more complex that it had grown international in scope. In that complexity everyone was expected to be culturally engaged yet non-accommodating. While disagreeing with the perspectives and solutions of others, he was willing to accept them in a pluralistic society, because their diversity would ensure a truly healthy, just, and organic society. This organic view, he acknowledged in his second 1898 Stone Lectures, was indebted to his ethical professors.

Kuyper's largely theoretical address didn't do full justice to the French Revolution, making liberalism too extreme and ignoring the development within liberalism. While his reclamation of the workers' position and the provision of many rights were laudatory, his suggestion that workers ought to be satisfied with little, look for a higher ideal, and carry their cross has something of a medieval utopian quality.

British historian Peter Heslam, discussing Kuyper's sixth lecture, noted that Kuyper's cultural pessimism was not uncommon, remarking that "in order to emphasize the need for the development of Calvinism in the future, Kuyper depicted the sorry state of current affairs." Heslam's observation hints at a paradox in Kuyper.

His views on women also have been attacked. Sphere sovereignty was detrimental to women, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen argued, for they were only allocated nurturing tasks and home maintenance. This type of preservation of the organic balance of society had several consequences: men were expected to earn a family wage, be oriented toward public achievements, be tied to their families through their breadwinning role, and be rational and individualistic. Women by contrast were to be "expressive specialists," meaning that they were emotional, relational, and identified mainly by ties to family, church, and neighborhood. This division contributed to what now often is called the traditional family, but was in reality a fairly recent phenomenon. Kuyper theologically legitimized this shift, and in doing so he "was as much a nineteenth-century bourgeois as the political opponents whom he claimed in other respects to be opposing."

This article is continued on page 15

Columns

Intangible Things
Heidi VanderSlikke

A pirate tale

"I feel like a contestant on the Amazing Race," I said to Jack. He smiled, but focused on the road ahead.

"Scary driving on the left-hand side, isn't it?" he said as he maneuvered the rental car through another roundabout and onto the straightaway – as straight as the way gets in Barbados.

I glanced at the map in my hands. Few roads had names. Many ended abruptly in the middle of nowhere. We had left the hotel that morning with no particular agenda, other than to explore the island. I wanted to show Jack Sam Lord's Castle. As a teenager I spent a day there with my parents. Back then it was an exclusive resort, a haven for British royalty and Hollywood celebrities. I recalled enormous tooled ceilings, marble steps and ornate railings. But most of all I remembered the folklore surrounding the place and its original owner – a pirate named Sam Lord.

Not as famous as Captain Morgan or Blackbeard, Samuel Hall Lord (1778-1844) was nonetheless a successful buccaneer, known for his cunning tactics. Legend has it he hung lanterns in the coconut groves of his estate, luring unsuspecting navigators to think they were the lights of Bridgetown. Once the ships ran aground on the coral reef, they were easy prey for Hall and his band of thieves.

I guided Jack through numerous wrong turns. He remained patient, even as we drove by the same corner store for the third time. At last we sat in front of a broken down wall bearing a bleached out painting of the resort. We drove down a bumpy laneway and were about to turn around when a woman in a minivan appeared.

"Can you tell us where Sam Lord's Castle is?" Jack asked her.

With an amused smile she pointed toward an open-ended steel bin the size of a box car, half filled with old plumbing fixtures and broken furniture. "There's a path through the woods leading to the stairway," she said.

We made our way through the overgrowth beside the giant dumpster into the bush and onto a trail covered in fallen leaves and garbage. Just before we reached the cliff, we caught a glimpse of the castle off to the left. Its distinctive shape and white walls stood starkly against the turquoise sky. The once manicured gardens now choked off the front steps. Balconies sagged and shutters dangled. A sheet of rusty steel lay strewn across the massive veranda. I blinked in disbelief.

Ahead of us a rickety set of stairs descended to the coconut grove far below. Jack climbed down first, warning me of rotting steps and others missing altogether. We wandered through the grove, the ocean breeze fresh on our faces. A ramshackle trailer stood close to the beach. From inside a voice called out some unintelligible question.

"Okay, we're fine, thanks," Jack replied and quickened his pace.

Further along the beach an ancient stone stairway led up the face of the cliff. Arriving at the top we saw the castle directly in front of us.

"Oh how the mighty have fallen," I said as we walked through the parched tangle of weeds and grass. Empty pools and fountains, abandoned tennis courts and gazebos sat cracked and crumbling in the intense sunlight. The mansion built by slaves, its ostentatious walls aligned four-square with the compass points, stood as a dilapidated monument to human pride.

Later on, at the restaurant where we stopped for lunch I asked the server what happened to Sam Lord's Castle. "That's a sad story," she said and explained that bad management and shady business dealings had led to bankruptcy. The government had no funds for restoration. Once an icon of Bajan history, it has now become a national eyesore.

Back in Canada a few days later I trudged through the snow with Rocky, my tropical tan buried under layers of winter clothing. I tried to imagine the summer heat shimmering up from the familiar fields. I looked at our beloved house and barns. There's not a building here that Jack hasn't had a hand in constructing. What will they look like a couple of hundred years from now?

Our days are like grass, says the psalmist. Pirates and farmers alike flourish as the flowers, then fade away and their place remembers them no more. But for God's children, we'll be moving on to somewhere beautiful beyond imagination. And we'll spend all eternity in the company of the Artist who created both the sandy beaches and the snow covered fields. Now that's a legacy!

Heidi Vander Slikke (vanderslikke@everus.ca) lives in Harriston, Ont.

From Toddlers to Teens
by Denise Dykstra

The grand thing about grandparents (and other extended family)

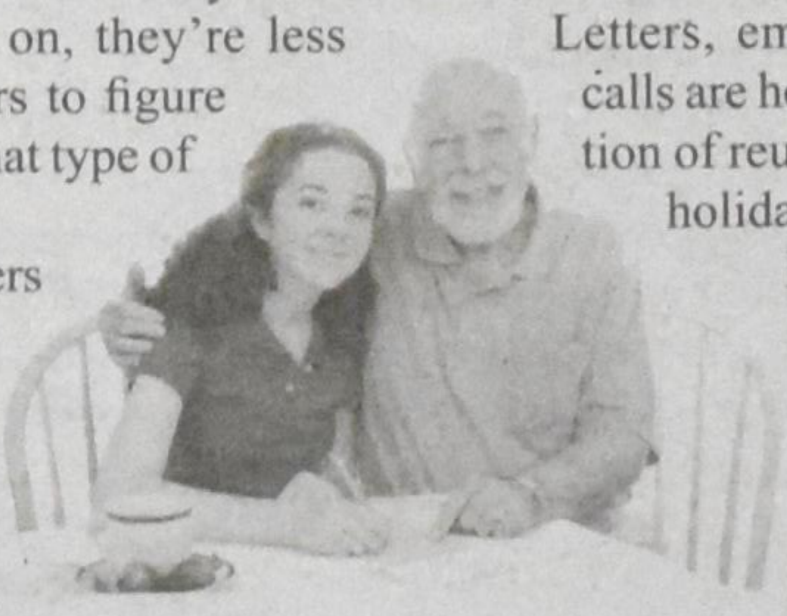
A couple of weeks ago, when my in-laws were in town, my parents stopped by for a cup of coffee. A simple thing really, but as our four folks sat in the living room chatting, I was struck by what a blessing it was. A blessing for my husband and I, of course, but even more so a blessing for our children. How many kids these days have four grandparents in their lives, four grandparents who know them and love them and who are able to spend time with them in a meaningful way?

It wasn't until I became a parent of teenagers that I realized what a godsend it was for children to have a relationship with their extended family. I always knew it was wonderful, but I never realized it was also beneficial – beneficial to their development and beneficial to their self-esteem.

A child's first community

Kids need people. From the moment they're born, they're programmed to bond. Children do best when they have an emotional support network around them, and family members – grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins – can be an automatic support.

When kids have many people in their lives that love them, they have many people to help guide them on their way to maturity. They have many people they can turn to when the need arises. Kids get their sense of direction from somebody, and if they have enough adults to depend on, they're less likely to turn to their peers to figure out what they value and what type of person they'd like to be.



Extended family members can be great role models. This is invaluable for children when they're at an age in which they're forming their sense of identity. When kids are provided with an understanding of cultural heritage and family history, they feel a connection. From that connection they better comprehend their place in the world. They recognize that they belong to a unique family unit and that their contribution as a member is important. They experience an unconditional acceptance that enhances their feelings of self-worth.

From ideal to real

At this point you may be thinking, okay, all this makes sense, but it isn't exactly realistic. How many extended families in this day and age see each other regularly? And how many actually get along?

It's true: face-to-face contact with relatives isn't always possible due to geographical distance, but there are still things that can be done to foster a sense of belonging.

Letters, email, photos and phone calls are helpful, as is the organization of reunions and the sharing of holidays.

Kids can even benefit from extended family when the family is fractured. They can learn some important lessons by watching the way people behave. Because we know much about our family members' personal lives, kids can learn from mistakes that various people make. They can observe first-hand the challenges family members are going through and then see how those family members handle those challenges. They can also learn how we, as relatives and Christians, can support those who make poor choices.

Joy in the family

One last benefit for kids: having a relationship with extended family can be a lot of fun. Cousins have much in common and can be ready-made friends. Aunts and uncles are responsible adults that can mentor, joke around and buy great gifts. Grandparents often have extra time on their hands and can take children to fun places, teach them useful things and spoil them.

This is certainly true in our home. When our kids were little, Pake walked them to school, Nana read them books, Grandpa taught them to tie their shoes, and Grandma brought them toys from the thrift store. Now that they're older, Grandpa takes them out for breakfast, Pake draws them pictures, Nana watches movies with them, and Grandma brings them clothes.

Over the past year our kids have been to the Vancouver Aquarium and the Edmonton Festival of Trees. They've received Christmas stockings from an auntie and Slurpees from an uncle. They've played with their cousins and been doted on by their grandparents. In other words, they've been shown over and over that they are loved – not just by their parents, but by their parents' entire families. To whom they belong.

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The Comforter (Part II)

And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Counselor
to be with you forever John 14:16

A. Kuyper

This is part 2 of Kuyper's exploration of John 14:16. In the first half, he asked what it means that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, concluding that the Spirit gives us comfort in life's pain and confusion, as opposed to comfort from that pain through isolation from sin's effects. – Editor

Despair

More typically the struggle goes on continually throughout our lives as God's children; there are moments of respite, but time and again we feel ourselves drowning as if we are tangled up in seaweed and pulled under by tentacles from the depths.

That is not living in the Spirit; and it hardly deserves to be called living at all. The holy attributes of God are clear to the soul; there is no doubt about how to obtain them and how to find them. Likewise we do not desire to depart from God, rather, we experience a strong desire to cling to the living God. But we know that innate human goodness cannot bring us to him, and our weak heart, which ought to place its hope in the holiness of the living God, is only tormented by evil thoughts. A deep chasm appears between our mumbled prayers and the living God. The soul asks itself, "What do I have that distinguishes me as a child of God?" And it finds nothing – not one ray of hope – and so it cries out in despair, "It were better for me that a millstone were hung about my neck, and that I were drowned in the depth of the sea, for I have offended one of your little ones" [cf. Matt. 18:6].

Frequently we hear about suicide, and it is said that many tormented souls become insane. Well, if there were no Pentecost, and a child of God should suffer day in and day out for many years, always in doubt and self-incrimination, then indeed insanity would be true relief and such a soul could hardly be blamed for committing suicide.

Without the Holy Spirit, such wretched souls would remain twisted and tormented in their distress, never becoming contented children of a loving Father.

Into your unholy heart

Note well, that exactly at this point we meet the glory of the Comforter. We manifest exactly those kind of wounds for which the Holy Spirit has prepared his balm. He comes for the children of God, who are plagued by inner torment; for the upright of heart, who are powerless to overcome their own unrighteousness, both men and women who want to work for God and his righteousness, and yet know that they can't. For all of them the work of the divine Comforter is unspeakably precious. He is the Holy Spirit, God Almighty himself. All around us we find an unholy world, but the Holy Spirit does not say, "I want nothing to do with this evil world, and with the unholy hearts of men". No, this Holy Spirit speaks to you from within the depths of this unholy world, into the depravity of your unholy heart.

He does not remain far off, but has come down to our earth, and on this earth chooses a community of people and enters their hearts as if finding there a holy temple for himself. That is where he now lives, no longer approaching us from a distance. On the day of Pentecost he has been poured out, never to return to heaven. And the church of Jesus Christ has not lacked his presence for one moment since that day.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is with and among us, and is the greatest comfort for our souls! The divine Holy Spirit who penetrates all things and knows everything came to us and has never left us. He remains with us and, even when all else seems to be headed for destruction, he remains near us, never leaving, calling, "Do not fear, I will never leave you not forsake you".

Is that not indescribably wonderful? You may be laid up on your sickbed, doubled up with pain because cancer is consuming your body, yet even when your soul can hardly take it, you still know the unbroken presence and protection of God's holy angel, nay, his Holy Spirit, who is God himself, guarding you as you fall asleep, and giving comfort when you are choked up in your anguish. We have the sure knowledge that in spite of the impurity and depravity of our heart, the Holy Spirit does not desert us. When everything around us freezes up and we are stone cold, we can yet look to the comforting warm embrace of the Holy Spirit, glowing with love, and breathing new life into our anxious breast.

Can you already sense this comfort? Is there any other comfort more precious? Is not this Comforter like the best of guides to accompany you through this present dark world, with all its deadly temptations? Does your heart not leap for joy when once again you notice that Holy Spirit guiding you from within?

Keep the celebration new

Even so, this is not yet the complete fullness of his comfort.

It is not enough that the Spirit remains right with you and shares your oppression, for he does much more. He not only comes to you, but dwells in you, and comforts you by pouring out a wonderful faith into your heart. For what else does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit lives in you than that he shares your lot in life, your weal and woe. He comes to live with you even as you are stricken in poverty to share his overwhelming riches with you.

Is that not a wonderful comfort?

Imagine if you can, a truly miserable and poor family, where all the cupboards are bare and the clothes worn to threads. Even worse, a disparate mood has set in as well. Then an incredibly rich stranger comes along and moves into their hovel, bringing cheer and happiness as well as his suitcases full of riches and wealth to share. Certainly, that family would be comforted. Could one think of anything better for such a family?

This is exactly what the Holy Spirit accomplishes for God's children. He does not presume that you are rich, but knows that you are dirt poor. He does not assume that you are well-dressed, but knows you in your nakedness. He does not expect you to be beautiful and have a silky smooth skin, for he knows all the sores that exude from your heart.

This same Holy Spirit who has access to all the riches of heaven, has nevertheless come down to live in you, and share in your life. This means that when the collection agent knocks at your door and you don't have money to pay, he will pay for you; when there is no food in the house, he provides bread; and when you are too embarrassed to go out because of your threadbare clothes, he provides a brand new cloak to cover your shame.

Knowing all this, would you not expect that on Pentecost the church raises a jubilant song of praise to God for such faithfulness?

May Pentecost always remain a new celebration! For we know that we are always inclined to regress in our understanding, and forget with our sinful imagination that the Holy Spirit has actually come to live with us. Instead, every time when church bells call us to worship on Pentecost, our sleepy souls revive and experience anew the saving touch of the Holy Spirit, the hand that lavishes us with his riches and the heavenly voice that whispers gently in our ears, "Don't be dismayed, all of you driven by the storms of life, for I, your divine Comforter, will always abide with you, and share with you all my heavenly riches, always!"

This meditation by Abraham Kuyper has been translated by Jack Van Meggelen (jack@vanmeggelen.ca). Jack lives in Willowdale, Ontario

The icon of the Feast of Pentecost is known as "The Descent of the Holy Spirit". It is an icon of bold colours of red and gold signifying that this is a great event. The movement of the icon is from the top to the bottom. At the top of the icon is a semicircle with rays coming from it. The rays are pointing toward the Apostles, and the tongues of fire are seen descending upon each one of them signifying the descent of the Holy Spirit. The building in the background of the icon represents the upper room where the Disciples of Christ gathered after the Ascension. The Apostles are shown seated in a semicircle which shows the unity of the Church. The golden nimbus around the heads of the Apostles in this icon are sometimes shown as small red tongues of fire in other versions. The scrolls being held by the Apostles represent the Gospels, as the Apostles participated both in the writing of the Gospels and carrying the Gospel message to all the earth. The scrolls also represent the teaching authority given them when they were commissioned by Christ.

In the centre of the icon below the Apostles, a royal figure is seen. This is a symbolic figure, Cosmos, representing the people of the world living in darkness and sin, and involved in pagan worship. However, the figure carries in his hands a cloth containing scrolls which represent the teaching of the Apostles. The figure is bent over or kneeling as a reflection of the effect of the sin of Adam on mankind. In the icon of Pentecost we see the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, sent down upon the Apostles who will teach the nations and baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity. Here we see that the Church is brought together and sustained in unity through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit guides the Church in the missionary endeavor throughout the world, and that the Spirit nurtures the Body of Christ, the Church, in truth and love

Society

THE PUBLIC SQUARE
Harry Antonides

Caledonia – where political correctness trumped the law

Nothing symbolizes the pathetic gutlessness of Dalton McGuinty's government, or that of the provincial police force that is nominally sworn to protect the province's residents, than the saga now playing out in a Hamilton courtroom. (*National Post*, Nov. 28, 2009)

Where to begin this story of incompetence and treachery in high places?

The circumstances leading to the Hamilton court scene began in February 2006 when members of the Six Nations Mohawk Reserve (aka the Warrior Society) "occupied" and halted the Douglas Creek Estate housing development in Caledonia, Ontario. They claimed ownership and started to blockade roads. In one instance they dropped hundreds of tires across the highway, doused them with gasoline and set them on fire. That's how a four-year campaign of lawless harassment started.

Instead of removing the bullying trespassers and charging them with a criminal offence, the government bought them off with a $12-million payment to the developer. In other words, they ceded the property to the lawbreakers. But that did not stop the latter from continuing to interfere with the surrounding neighbours. Those unfortunate enough to live close to the contested property received the brunt of this thuggish behaviour.

A family under siege

David Brown and his wife Dana Chatwell have endured four years of harassment and humiliation that has turned their lives upside down. Mr. Brown stated in court testimony that he was required to carry a native-issued "passport" and needed approval to enter his own house.

Once he arrived after "curfew" and was denied entry, and then jailed by the police when he caused trouble by ignoring the natives. The family was subjected to loud, obscene insults. This happened once while the family was standing on their deck with a few guests, as well as uniformed police officers. However, the officers did nothing.

Dana Chatwell testified that her family felt under threat and were frightened by all the harassment. On Labour Day weekend 2008, she was told that the protesters would put up another roadblock. She and her son decided to leave, but they were stopped at a barricade by a "big native guy" with a 2x4 who told her when she asked to go through, "No way, I own Caledonia." Nearby police officers did nothing.

Frustrated by the police's refusal to protect them against the ongoing lawless behaviour, Brown and Chatwell lodged a $7-milliom lawsuit against the Ontario government and the OPP. The Ontario Superior Court hearing began in late November, 2009.

OPP Inspector Brian Haggith testified in court that the native protesters "set up a checkpoint … almost like they were entering another country." He also said that when the protesters set fire to a wooden bridge, the fire department responded but then withdrew because of death threats and the failure of the Ontario Provincial Police to protect them. In addition, an electrical substation was destroyed, causing more than $1-million in damage. The Inspector asked for a change in OPP's hands-off policy, but that request was denied.

A Dangerous Double Standard.

But why would the OPP instruct the officers on the scene to turn a blind eye to obviously lawless conduct of the natives? The answer to that question was provided by the Crown lawyer David Felicient who told the court that the couple's complaint "must be understood against the backdrop of the unique character of aboriginal occupation and protests." Therefore the OPP were handcuffed by the "policy implications" of negotiation and reconciliation with natives, he explained.

In other words, the law of the land does not apply equally to every citizen. Some are able to get away with outrageous behaviour that would land the rest of us in jail. This blatant double standard is the outcome of an incomprehensible policy governing Aboriginal peoples driven by white guilt and native victimhood.

Obviously, the authorities did not want to have their dereliction of duty exposed in open court for all to see. So they decided to cut their losses and negotiated a settlement accepted by the plaintiffs, who were only too happy to leave all of this behind.

In his cross examination, Mr. Felicient tried to undermine Dana Chatwell's claim that the state of siege her family lived under led to marital, financial and emotional stresses. He did so by calling attention to the fact that she had been diagnosed with a stress disorder before the protests started, that she had gone on a number of vacations trips, that she had received $40,000 inheritance money, that she had abused alcohol, had not been faithful in her marriage, and that their marriage was deeply troubled.

This line of questioning takes your breath away, because it displays an utter disregard for the privacy and dignity of a person. She is punished twice. Once, she is abandoned by those whose sworn responsibility it is to protect her. Then again, adding insult to injury, when she seeks a measure of restitution, she is publicly humiliated by the same authority that abandoned her.

Chalk up another victory for political correctness. The travesty of justice that occurred in Caledonia makes it crystal clear that Canada's Aboriginal policies need a thoroughgoing overhaul. That day cannot come too soon.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Christ @ Culture
Lloyd Rang

iGod

The words we capitalize reveal what's important to us. For example, in English, we capitalize the first word in every sentence. It's a little signal to the reader that says: look out! Here comes a new thought! Pay attention!

We also capitalize certain job titles. "Chairman of the Board," for example. Or "Governor General." But we don't capitalize others such as "janitor," "mechanic" or "newspaper editor."

We also capitalize people's first and last names, but not the pronouns used to refer to them.

All except for one.

We capitalize the first person singular. We capitalize the letter "I." English is somewhat unusual that way. In many languages (Russian and German, for example) it's the second-person singular (or "you" in English) that gets capitalized. Some people think that, in those languages, capitalizing the pronoun that applies to other people is a sign of respect. In English, that kind of respect ended with the use of "Thou" to describe God. Since then, it's been capital "I" all the way.

And, nowadays, that little pronoun is cropping up in more places than ever.

These days, you talk on your iPhone and download iTunes to your iPod. In Microsoft's Windows environment, everything is first person possessive: ("my computer," "my documents," my pictures," and so on).

If you think about it, that's strange. We can communicate with one another instantly, from anywhere, using handheld devices or the web.

There have never been so many ways to reach out and touch one another.

And yet the software and the devices we use to communicate are branded with the almighty "I."

All of this seems to imply that what's really important to me is not you … it's me. It's as though our narcissism goes so deep, it is built right into the foundations of our language itself.

Now, lest we people of faith get all smug about this, think about the songs we sing in church. Ryan Flanagan has. He runs a blog called "Reform Worship," [www.reformworship.com] in which he looks at contemporary worship practices and finds that, among other things, the focus in our singinghas stopped being ab out the "You" that is worthy of praise, and has become about the "I" that is ostensibly doing the praising.

He writes:

"The lyrical content of most Contemporary Praise and Worship songs lacks doctrinal depth. "Love" seems to be the hottest topic. There has been a gradual shift from singing of "God's love" in general, to singing of "God's love for us," to "our love for God," to "God's love for me," and it has become ever more popular to sing of "my love for You, God," with God as the object of my affection."

He notes that:

Of the "top twenty-five Contemporary Praise and Worship songs of all times … nineteen use the first-person singular (I/me/my) with God as the direct object (You), while only eight of them partially use the third-person singular (he/him/his) with God as the subject. Not only has this lent to narcissistic worship, but it has largely diminished the element of narrative in expressions of worship. God's great story is not told. Worshipers do not try to find their place in God's story. Instead, they tell God their own stories and try to fit Him into their own lives."

That's pretty harsh stuff, and it seems a little unfair.

But ask yourself this: when I raise my hands in worship, moved by the power of the music, which pronoun makes them rise? Is it the "I" or is it the "you?" Are we honestly praising an all-powerful God, the Creator, the Father, the one so holy, he requires that we approach him through the mediation of the Son? The One our grandparents referred to tremblingly, in prayer, as capital-t Thou?

Or are we worshipping Jesus – aka "JC"– our buddy, our lover, our personalized and customized back-pocket iGod … who walks with us and talks to us and has a "personal relationship" with us?

Are we, in short, inventing and reconstructing a God out of our own personal and emotional experiences – and reacting emotionally to that?

Raise such questions in your church, and you'll quickly get branded a "traditionalist," or "out of touch." After all, we're told, youth want songs that move them. They demand music that has a beat. That makes their hands fly up and their hips shake. And, by implication, if they don't get what THEY want, they will go somewhere else.

But there is no shortage of places young people – and older people – can go to get exactly what they want. Only in church can you find out what God wants. And if that experience isn't a little bit uncomfortable – if it doesn't make you aware of just how impossible it is for YOU to please HIM through anything YOU do – if instead it's focused on how worthy HE is to receive YOUR praise – we're probably not worshipping the almighty God at all, but the almighty "I."

In a world where you can get virtually anything "on demand," the last thing we need is "on demand" worship. We need worship that demands something of us.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) is a member of Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville, Ontario.

My window seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

Hope and heartbreak in Haiti

One of my best earthly friends lives in Haiti with his family. Matt Van Geest and I have been friends for decades. Our lives have been woven in different locations and directions over the past 20 years, but we have always been intertwined through weekly, if not daily, contact. We've lived together as adults, been supportive to each other through the ups and downs of marriage, having children, losing a spouse, work and career issues.

Five years ago, Matt was led to Haiti. He and Esther now have two glorious children and have been working in Haiti for several different organizations, including the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

When the earthquake hit Haiti a few weeks ago, I was glued to the radio. The earthquake hit at 5:00 P.M. EST, and I received a call from Matt on my cell phone at 5:31 from Haiti. The call didn't go through – when I picked it up, the call dropped. So did my stomach. I didn't hear until hours later that Matt, Esther and their children were safe and that his call was a desperate attempt to get word to friends or family that they were okay. It was an emotional time for many of us. I was glued to the news to learn more about what was happening.

Each time I think of all the thousands of people that were killed I feel terrible sadness. I am also reminded of my wife Marisa's death and how my community pulled me through. My church community. My work community. My family. My friends. Without that community, I don't know where I would be today. I still grieve, of course, but my grieving process was wrapped in the love of my community. It still is.

Matt, Esther, Gabriela and Niko

An indomitable spirit

Matt talks a lot about Haiti when we get together or when we talk on the phone or email. I was asking him about the looting and violence I was seeing on TV. It was a sad sight – people in such desperate circumstances going to such desperate lengths to get food and other supplies. But then I heard another story from Matt – the story that CNN and other networks are not telling, or at least not telling enough. And that story is the story of the indomitable Haitian spirit. This is a country, as we all know, that has been beaten down by regular natural and man-made disasters, by poor governance and by the unchecked influence of foreign powers. But somehow they survive, they pull through. And they do that for the same reason that I am pulling through – because of community.

Digging deeper, there are many stories of people in Haiti helping each other. Of communities pulling together. Of people saving their neighbours from the rubble. Of people sharing the little they have. Of families taking other families in to provide them a safe space to sleep. Even in the bigger camps, people are organizing themselves to manage food and water distribution, digging latrines, garbage clean-up, protection of women and children. Haitians taking care of Haitians. People taking care of people.

I was happy to learn about that. Instead of feeling sorry for Haitians, we need to be encouraged by their strength (could any of *us* survive more than two weeks under a collapsed building with little or no food or water?) and their embodiment of community.

But the fact remains that so many people died. And were unceremoniously buried. Come quickly Lord Jesus.

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstra@gmail.com) is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives near St. Catharines, Ont. with his three children.

Kuyper & Work *...continued from p. 11*

The railway strike

As noted above Kuyper was only able to implement a very limited segment of his social program while as prime minister (1901-1905). There is no consensus about his premiership, but the general tendency seems to characterize it as weak. The handling of the 1903 railway strike has received very strong condemnation. Biographer Frank Vanden Berg has tried to exonerate Kuyper's actions. His summary of the events still cover eight pages. Only a few details are relevant here. In January there was a water transport strike in Amsterdam which, through solidarity, broadened to a national railway strike. Commercial and industrial activity came to a standstill. Socialists, anarchists and syndicalists supported the strike, thus making the economic issue also a political issue. Furthermore, force was involved. In this volatile situation Kuyper had to do something. In principle he accepted strikes. However, he objected to its use for political purposes. On February 24th, he introduced three bills that were passed in April. The essence of one of them criminalized some of the strike's activities and became known as the anti-railroad strike law. The effect was that the country returned to normalcy. Vanden Berg commented that "Kuyper had rendered the country the highest type of national service." (p.206) He also seemed to appreciate that Kuyper "did not hesitate to use the mailed fist." At issue here is the "sword" of government, but did Kuyper's use of the "sword" exemplify the life of Jesus? Was there a discrepancy between Kuyper's theory and his practice? On the one hand he seemed to give much to the worker, while on the other hand he took away some of their rights.

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Bert den Boggende (bertdenb@yahoo.com) lives in Brooks, Alberta.

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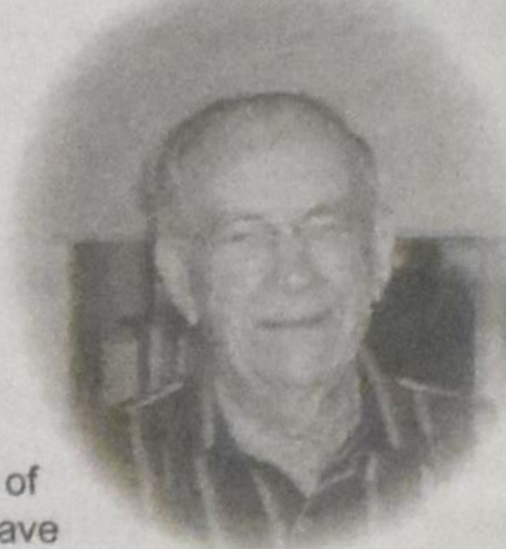
Obituary

April 1, 1921 - January 16, 2010

Wobbe Bylsma



"Well done good and faithful servant." Matt 25:21a

On January 16, our Lord took his servant, Wobbe, into his loving arms.

Left to mourn his passing is his wife of more than 67 years, Pietje (Venema). Dearly missed by his children Theresa and Jim Brand of Dashwood; Auke & Chris Bylsma of Blyth; Wibbina and Gerald Toonk of Exeter; John & Ruby Bylsma of Thorndale; Anne & Terry Kaastra of Goderich; Cory & John Kuipers of Goderich, and Pat & Dave Brodie of Brucefield. Cherished grandfather, Pake and great-grand-father of 28 grandchildren and their families including 26 great-grandchildren.

Also survived by brother-in-law Willem (Tineke) Venema of Brampton, and sister-in-law Corrie (Jan) Bouma (Venema) of The Netherlands, as well as many nieces and nephews both in Canada and The Netherlands. Predeceased by his only brother and sibling Anne Bylsma. Also predeceased by a grandson Shaun Kaastra (1993) and a great-granddaughter Angela Bylsma-Moffat in infancy (2003).

Even as we mourn, we his family rejoice in the knowledge that he was promoted to glory. We are honoured to call him our Dad, Grandpa and Pake and we miss him sorely. Born in Friesland, the Netherlands, he left his war weary homeland in 1948 with Pietje and their first two children to come to this land of new opportunity. While always a proud Frisian, he was an equally proud Canadian and found his piece of dirt in Hullett Township in 1954. After retiring from dairying, he discovered his niche in woodworking and many an hour he spent making things for his family, and charity auctions. He lived on one of the farms until this summer, when failing health forced him to assisted living in Seaforth Manor, where he was once again close to Pietjè whom he so devotedly cared for, in her ill health for many years.

The funeral service was held on Tuesday, January 19, 2010 at 11 a.m., in the Clinton CRC, where he was a longtime member. Pastor Ron Luchies officiated the service.

Family correspondence – Auke and Chris Bylsma, RR1, Blyth ON N0M 1H0

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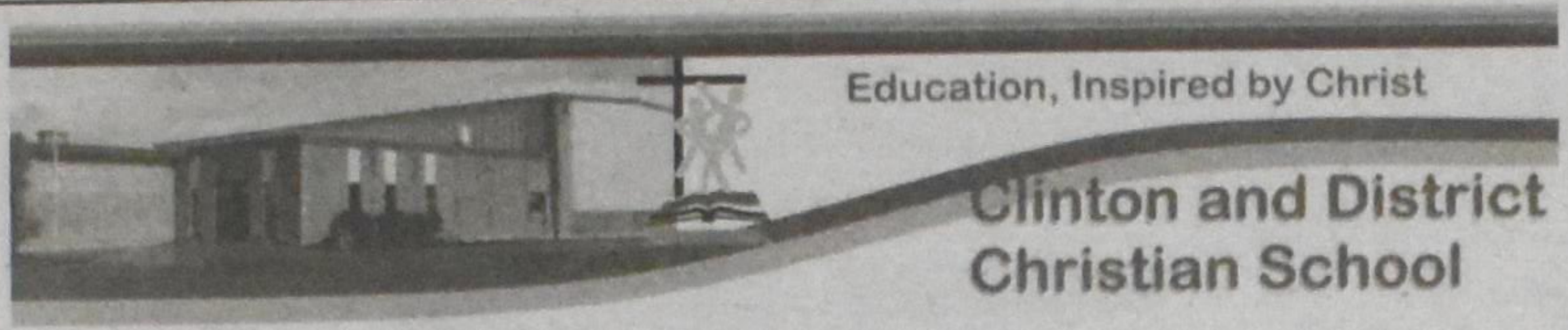

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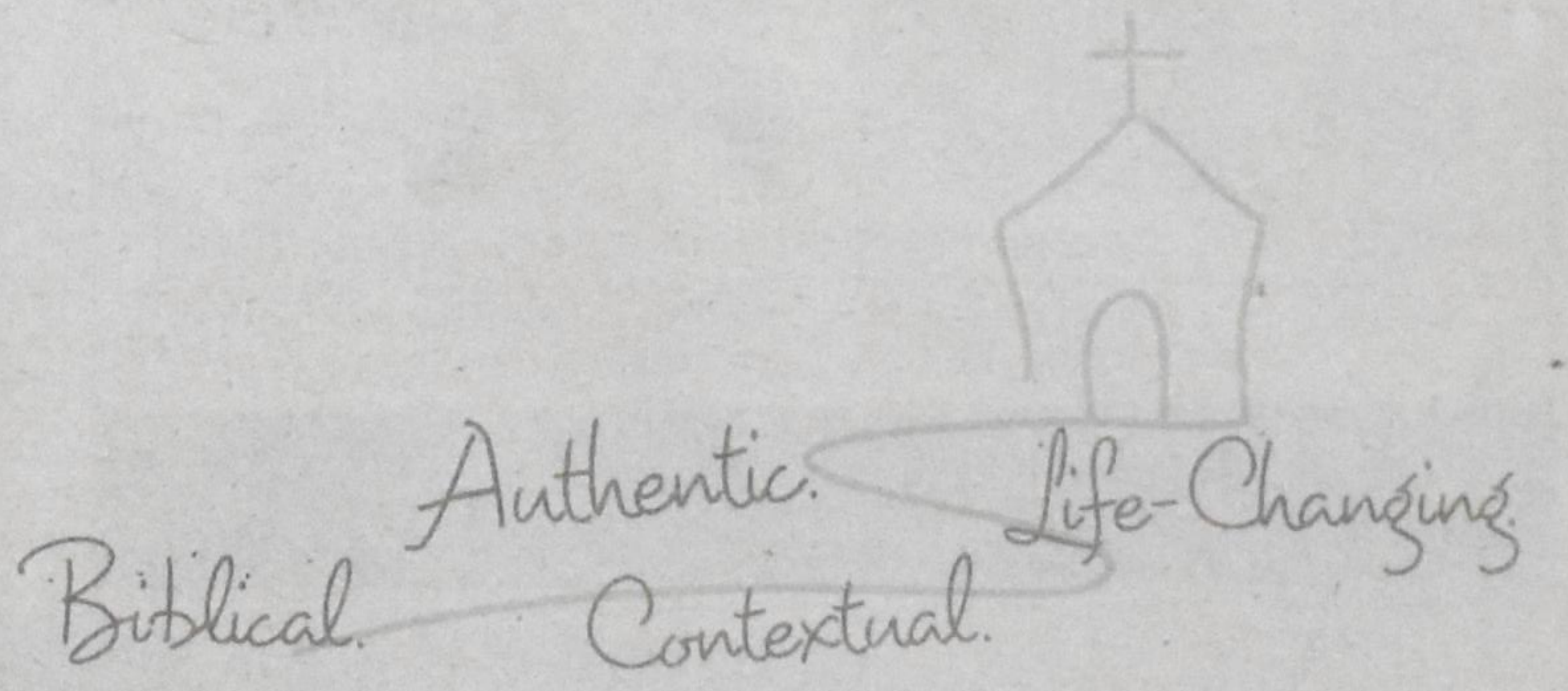

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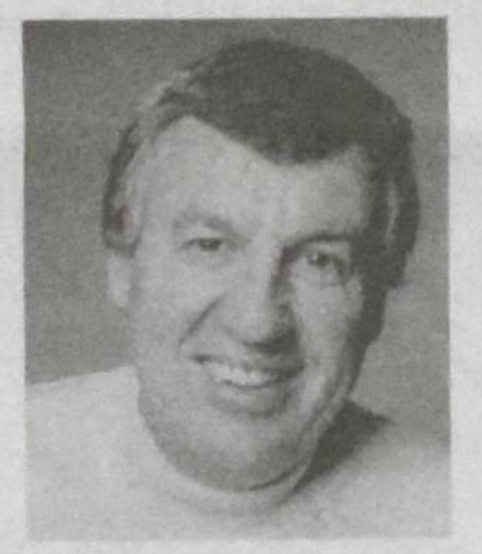

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 6 The Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Abuse Prevention Training Event will take place on Saturday from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at the Waterloo CRC. /www.scc.wmott.ca

Mar 12 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**. 8 p.m. See ad.

Mar 13 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**. 2:30 pm & 8 p.m. See ad

Mar 14 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.

Mar 26 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at Great Lakes Christian College in **Beamsville** 8 p.m.

Apr 9 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at the **London** Dutch Canadian Hall in **London.** See ad.

Apr 17 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at the Blyth Festival Theatre in **Blyth** 8 p.m. See ad.

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.

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News

Against the cultural grain?

Two family farm profiles

A new German-based board game called *Agricola* has the following tagline: "The 17th century: not an easy period for a farmer!" Despite that disclaimer, strategy fans have jumped at the chance to imitate antiquated agricultural: develop a well-balanced farm and you'll win the complex game. Successful or not, of course, players can pack away all the pieces representing sheep, wild boar, and grain once the final round is done.

For Canadian farmers in the 21st century, however, the game goes on. Would today's farmers agree that it's "not an easy period for a farmer," or have things gotten better? Is the farm still a great part of God's green earth to raise kids or is that an old-fashioned idea? *CC* interviewed families on two contemporary farms to find out what it's like today, and where Canadian farmers might be going from here. *–Angela Reitsma Bick*

Jack and Paula with sons Steve, Dave and Robert in front of a logging truck.

I: The Dielemans

Curt Gesch

The idea of a family farm, complete with stay-at-home-mom; children mucking about with chickens, calves, ducks; a rope-swing over the old pond; and a busy dad finding time to instruct the respectful children at evening devotional time . . . . Well, except in a few rare cases, that picture does not match reality.

In central British Columbia, there are very few family farms that don't rely on off-farm income. Dairy and poultry farmers pay astronomical quota fees and in return get a fair return, but for most of the rest of us, it's "get a job to subsidize the farm." As Jack Dieleman says, "The farm is a great place to raise the kids, but we paid more for fuel in the past year than we've got income from the farm."

The Dielemans of Round Lake, B.C., are perhaps typical of a new type of family farm. Jack is the truck driver, Paula is the farmer. Jack does the field work in the summer. Paula does the farming the rest of the year. They have six children, all boys.

Paula, Jack and a steer named Elmo.

Paula's main crops are simple: hay, silage, cows. They have scaled down on beef – from 60 to 30 cattle – but also raise hogs, chickens and turkeys, mostly for their own use. They also own two to five horses in any given year. Mechanically, they own a herd of snowmobiles, quads, and motorbikes, besides tractors, rakes, swathers and balers.

Raising future leaders

Jack and Paula built a shop first and lived in it for three years. The two youngest children were born while they lived in the shop. This presented quite a challenge, according to Paula. "The shop only had a parts room upstairs that all the boys used as their bedroom and there was an office and a bathroom; the rest of the building was all open. It was a little difficult when Jack worked nights and he had to sleep when all the kids were awake, but we lived through it all. Once we moved into our house it was like having the best hotel in the country."

Jack, who is also an accomplished carpenter, finished a home for the family that serves the whole flock quite well.

Three sons – Robert, David, and Steve – still live at home. Jonathan, the oldest, still helps out by feeding every Saturday. He owns a small 40-acre farm that he is developing. Michael is at the University of Ottawa studying law, preparing to become Prime Minister. Chris is cowboying on a feedlot in southern Alberta.

The Dieleman family is active in supporting a local community, Round Lake, where Jack helped superintend the reconstruction of the community hall. Paula is an active supporter of the local school and 4-H club. The Dieleman boys have all been effective public speakers, readers, and leaders in 4-H competitions, their local church, and schools. Jack and Paula have both served as deacons at Telkwa Christian Reformed Church.

Community pillars

Small family farms remind me of some recent research about rural or small-town congregations. They may not increase dramatically in growth, may not measure up to *mega-* status, but frequently they are a strong witness to the continued existence of universally-sought values, and a supply of future leaders, shakers, and neighbours if they leave the field and move on to concrete pastures. Although the family beef farm may be struggling when it comes to income, the example of the Dieleman family demonstrates that a rural family is still, in many ways, the backbone of a local community.

Carla, Peter and Ruth VanderZaag

II: The VanderZaags

Angela Reitsma Bick

"We thought about finding the best place to raise our children," Peter VanderZaag says. "University setting, staying overseas, or coming back to try our hand at farming." After living abroad for twenty years, Peter and his wife Carla returned to Canada in 1991. They settled in Alliston, Ontario where Peter grew up working on the family farm alongside his father, Anne, and Uncle Harry. And where did the farm's name come from?

"We had worked in China where the rising sun is a sign of hope, so we named our farm SunRISE to avoid confusion with the existing VanderZaag farms and to create an acronym as a reminder of our hope in farming – Sustainable Research Involving Systems Education."

Today Peter and Carla own and operate a large-scale farm that grows, stores in state-of-the-art facilities, and markets over 400 hectares of potatoes annually. Many of the potatoes are sold for chips, and organic potatoes and Yukon Gold can be purchased fresh at the door. The VanderZaags are also involved in research to improve potato production and have developed three new varieties.

Rich and varied harvest

The VanderZaags have six children "and each learned so much working here," Peter says. "The skills and work ethic learned on the farm has been a valuable background for the diverse areas of study and work each has followed, from environmental science to politics, a vet clinic or peace and conflict studies." Their daughter, Ruth, has chosen farming as her career after being actively involved nearly her whole life.

Carla remembers grown men watching in admiration as "this cute young girl operated some piece of equipment with ease." Once, Peter recalls, a neighbouring farmer saw her driving a large tractor with a disk.

"How old is your daughter – 17 or 18?" he asked.

"Nope," Peter replied. "She's 13."

Ruth is now living her life-long dream of being a farmer. She recently purchased land and has contracted to grow her own potatoes.

According to the VanderZaags, nothing equals the "fulfillment of working with the land, growing crops, and seeing the whole process through." Peter believes that as the world's population increases and resources dwindle, farmers will play an increasingly vital role.

He is encouraged by the witness that an organization such as the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario has provided. And he's tried to encourage interest from the next generation in farming by sharing his equipment, vision and land.

"It's a tough business, but it's like any business," Peter concludes. "You have to work hard and be innovative." And, if the success of Sunrise Potato is any indication, his advice is worth noting. With a sharp business plan and a willingness to adapt, the VanderZaag family has thrived in Alliston.

Raising a family on a farm in Canada doesn't go against the cultural grain; instead, farm kids learn values that make them integral to the culture they grow into. And that's something that hasn't changed.

Ruth grades potatoes.

Tips we've learned along the way...

- There are normal stages of growth and development in the business life cycle (*Managing the Multi-generational Family Farm*, see *www.farmcentre.com)*.
- Input and support from outside experts is important for making wise decisions.
- A professional mediator enables each family member to express their opinion during difficult discussions.
- Listen. Listen. Listen.
- Be gentle with one another.

The VanderZaags